

The Importance and Failure of Small Groups
in the Church

A Professional
Project
Presented to
the Faculty of the
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In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree of
Doctor of Ministry

by
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IN MEMORIAM

In memory of my parents who dedicated me to the
ministry before my birth and made me who I am today.
My father, Reverend F. C. Peter, showed me how to serve
with dignity; and my mother, Zenith, taught me how to
give and receive.

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ABSTRACT

It is obvious that every church has groups and sub-groups within it and intends to find an effective medium of communication for sharing, caring, and growing in the wisdom of God and in the understanding of fellow humans. In this professional project, I attempt to point out how the small group of the local church may utilize the unique dynamics of its group life to win people to Christ and into the fellowship of believers.

Those who are called to lead church groups may find guidance for their work. Insights emerging from the research in group dynamics have been assembled and presented in the layman's language. Findings from the leadership training in growth groups, field of education, encounter group, and church history have been related to the leading of a Christian group.

I hope Christian laymen may find this project helpful in preparing themselves for vital participation in the group life of the church, because concerned Christians are always eager to know the underlying reasons for productive change in peoples' lives. They are anxious to know how to influence and to persuade people with their genuine love and concern.

In the pilgrimage of productive ministry, pastors who are service- and person-oriented may want to know how they can enhance their ministry by using the principles of dynamics but are afraid of people's rebellion against dragging the wisdom of the world into the sacred church. If Protestantism is to retain the priesthood of every

believer concept, then pastors as well as individual members need to be encouraged to engage in honest dialogue among themselves and purposeful sharing of their lives and convictions with one another in the small groups of the local church.

Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

The selection of this subject has been influenced by impending circumstances that I had been confronted with in my parish. My predecessor in his role as a pastor experimented with small groups in the church to enhance his ministry but ran into unresolvable conflicts with the congregation because sensory awareness, body affirmation, and emphasis on tactility and sensitivity training are quite alien to and very risky in the Christian life. Some members left the church to save their righteousness, others staged a protest and repeatedly shouted the slogan that the wisdom of the world is foolishness in the sight of God, others stayed with the church to reform it, and still others became passive spectators. I did not intend to start where my predecessor left off or correct his mistakes and crown myself with success or propose to create a successful, therapeutic group. Rather, I intended to study the subject diligently and to develop skill in effective communication that would dress the wounded spirits, thus promoting an emotional catharsis and letting spiritual healing take its course in the process of learning and understanding. I did not want to initiate a therapy in order to achieve my goal but, instead, I wanted to increase the quality and the clarity of human relationships between myself and the congregation.

I borrowed a rich mix of techniques and resources from group dynamics, behavioral psychology, human relations, leadership training, group therapy, meditation, and psychodrama; and I delved into church history in search of historical data to confirm that the early church

constantly used small groups for the spread of its gospel and growth. Being aware of this fact, I would encourage disturbed people to comfort themselves in the nurturing fellowship of faithfuls and would challenge well people to become better individuals.

The Genesis of Group Dynamics

Group dynamics began in the United States toward the end of the 1930's. Its origin as a distinct specialty is associated primarily with Kurt Lewin (1890-1947), who popularized the term "group dynamics," made significant contributions to both research and theory in group dynamics, and in 1945 established the first organization devoted exclusively to research in group dynamics. Lewin's contribution was of great importance; many supported the movement and expended their efforts in fostering the rise of group dynamics. In fact, the movement was nurtured by many developments in various disciplines and professions that occurred over a period of several years. Viewed in historical perspective, group dynamics can be seen as the convergence of certain trends within the social sciences and, more broadly, as the product of the particular society in which it arose.

The time and place of the rise of group dynamics were not accidental. American society of the 1930's provided the conditions needed for the emergence of such an intellectual movement; and over the years since that time, only certain countries have afforded an environment favorable to its growth. To date group dynamics has taken root primarily in the United States and in the countries of northwestern Europe, although there have been important developments in Israel, Japan, and India.

A remarkable phenomenon in church life today is the proliferation of small group activity. In the greater San Francisco area, there are at least a dozen types of religiously oriented small group activities. Many of these groups are not really a part of a local church structure, but their impact is so great that they are changing the character of church life. Small in size and intimate in nature, these groups strike the same note of religious concern with a strong emphasis on personal sharing. They are known by various names, such as Personal Groups, Encounter Groups, Spiritual Growth Groups, Prayer Therapy Groups, Yokefellow Groups, and Interpersonal Relations Groups. The East Oakland Parish, the Laymen's School of Religion, and the Explorations Institute are varied approaches aimed at meeting religious needs at a deeper level than that of ordinary church programs. A wide variety of organizations now provide for study groups, spiritual discipline groups, and therapy groups, often utilizing week-end retreats or week-long conferences. Although much of this activity is carried on outside the local church programs, enthusiasm generated on all sides is being felt within the church by the newer developments, such as intensive marathon experiences, play-back through TV tapes, and family games.

On the national scene, growth centers with such names as Esalen, Kairos, and Aureon are springing up throughout the country, loosely organized into the human potential movement. The director of one such center reports the hypotheses on which the centers are based as follows:

1. That average, healthy persons function at a fraction of their capacity.
2. A person's most exciting life-long adventure is actualizing his potential.

3. That the group environment is one of the best settings in which to achieve growth.
4. That personality growth can be achieved by those willing to invest themselves in this process.¹

These hypotheses could easily be included in the aims of church-related groups. There is nothing new about small sharing groups. The most vital eras in the history of Christianity have been characterized by small group activities.

Small Groups in the Church History

We seldom think of the disciples as a small group, but even a moment's reflection on the life that these twelve shared with Jesus reveals that a great deal of their time was spent in talking about their goals and aspirations, needs and fears. The major portion of 3-1/2 years of Jesus' life on earth was directed toward discovering an effective medium of communicating with his disciples so that they may perceive what Jesus was saying in words. He tried to establish an intimate fellowship. Elton Trueblood reminds us of Jesus' method:

His chosen method was the formation of a redemption society. He did not form an army, establish a headquarters or even write a book. All he did was to collect a few unpromising men, inspire them with the sense of his vocation and theirs, and build their lives into an intensive fellowship of affection, worship, and work.²

¹Bernard Gunther, Sense Relaxation (New York: Collier Books, 1968), p. 59, 89.

²Robert A. Raines, New Life in the Church (New York: Harper & Row 1961), p. 102.
Robert A. Raines, Reshaping the Christian Life (New York: Harper & Row, 1964)

I believe that if an individual wants to gain anything from the group, it is essential to contribute to the life of the group and its members and to retain sovereignty as an active individual while becoming an integral part of the group. Jesus knew of this principle very well. Mark says, "But Jesus withdrew himself with his disciples."³ Likewise, it is a common practice in therapeutic institutions for all who lead therapy groups to have the patience, within a group setting, to help others grow, to grow themselves, and to learn from all members as well as from their own reflections.

It is difficult to be a Christian in an unchristian world; so the scattered Christians need a community of like-minded people, gathered together for mutual support and encouragement. The strategy of the small group was well known to the author of the Epistle of Hebrews.

"Let us consider," he wrote, "how to stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together--but encouraging one another."⁴

It was certainly the strategy of Jesus that, after the disciples had gone out by twos to carry on his ministry, they came back together for an evaluation session.⁵ The record is very scanty on this point, and there is no true indication of how the conversation went; but in the light of Jesus' characteristic approach, one can make some assumptions.

³Mark 3:7 (RSV)

⁴Hebrews 10:24-25a (RSV)

⁵Mark 6:30-31 (RSV)

One assumption is that Jesus encouraged them to talk together for the purpose of catharsis and a sense of group support. Another is that He encouraged them to talk through their feelings of failure. Since Jesus was deeply interested in inner thoughts as well as outer actions, it is conceivable that He would not explore their inner feelings about success and failure.

The encouragement of one another not only gives support to group members but also supports the leader of the group as well. Robert Raines, who has written effectively of the transformation created in churches, has been served by small study groups. He testifies as follows to the significance of small groups for him personally: If I were to go to another church, the first thing I would do is to try to create such a group for my own selfish need.⁶

It is very clear that Jesus depended on His disciples for emotional support. When he was looking ahead to His probable death in Jerusalem and was struggling to find His place of leadership within the historic faith, He retired to a mountaintop and took Peter, James, and John with Him.⁷

Again in the garden of Gethsemane, it was the same three whom He took with Him to share His vigil and His heart searching.⁸ When He fled from the multitudes, it was with the disciples that He sought

⁶Elton Trueblood, *Alternative to Futility* (New York: Harper & Row, 1948), p. 29.

⁷Mark 9:2-13 (RSV); see Robert Leslie, Jesus and Logotherapy (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1965), p. 74-83.

⁸Mark 14:32-42 (RSV)

relaxation and recuperation. He depended on them for companionship even when they were unable to give complete loyalty. Although Jesus welcomed support from His chosen group, He was very realistic about it. He knew that protestations about loyalty were not the same as actually being loyal. When Peter declared his intention to stand firm at whatever the cost, Jesus chided him gently about his characteristic ways.⁹

It was characteristic of Jesus that the emotional support which He gave so freely was always honest in its appraisal and candid in its frankness. He never felt impelled to soften the facts in the interest of supporting a sagging self-esteem. Knowing Peter's temperament, He called attention to the ease of making assertions of loyalty when carrying them out would be quite a different matter. Indeed, it was this very quality of candor which helped His words of challenge, when they were uttered, to carry weight. His typical relationship was not clouded with well meaning but untrue utterances; people knew where they stood with Him.

Jesus not only counted on His disciples for support but also counted on them to keep Him in touch with what people were saying about Him. He asked them for feedback in order to keep in touch with reality. He asked, "Who do men say that I am?"¹⁰ He did not provide an answer to His own question, and it was not a rhetorical question. It was a question asked deliberately to get feedback, to find out how the crowd and the disciples were responding. He was sensitive to the response of

⁹Mark 14:30 (RSV)

¹⁰Mark 8:27 (RSV)

His intimate group. The difficulty that the disciples constantly experienced in truly understanding what Jesus was about gave Jesus further feedback about responses of people as a whole. If His intimate associates could not understand Him, how could casual acquaintances do so? Indeed, it is likely that feedback from the disciples was the decisive factor in sending Jesus to Jerusalem and to His virtually inevitable death.

The Methodist Class Meeting

Among the examples of significant small groups in the history of Christianity, the class meeting of early Methodism stands out prominently. When John Wesley began his ministry in mid-eighteenth century England, group ties were being broken on all sides. Major population shifts were resulting from the development of new industrial and mining areas. The established Church of England had virtually divorced itself from the real needs of the people. As a result, independent religious societies began to spring up to nurture the need for fellowship. Wesley was drawn to these societies, began to preach in them, and gradually developed a society. His followers were called "Methodists," and Wesley organized them into societies which were subsequently organized into groups of about twelve persons and called "class meetings."

The class meeting became the heart of Methodism. Religion was taken from the cold pulpit and became a warm and living thing in the hearts of class members. The class meeting was a neighborhood group, organized in the area in which the leader lived. Originally organized as a way of gathering weekly dues, the class meeting became a weekly

source of encouragement and reinforcement for Christian living. Each week the class leader would inquire into the state of each member's soul.¹¹

The church under persecution in East Germany has rediscovered some of its vitality in small, forbidden house meetings; and the renewal movement in the Church in our country has stressed again the unique place of the small group.

Group work in temples, synagogues, and Sunday School has a long history. There are probably more persons in groups organized by churches than in all other types of groups combined. Religions have fostered the worth of the individual, the servant concept of leadership, the unifying power of deep religious experience, and the need to love outsiders into the Kingdom.

Religious leaders have looked far too long upon group work as a secular movement, and they have not sought consciously to utilize the insights of group dynamics in their group life. As late as 1946, Luccock reported: "An analysis of the membership of the American Association of group workers showed less than twenty members in the field of religious education."¹² Sunday school teachers who tried to organize their classes into groups and carry on activities during the week found little cooperation and active opposition.

¹¹Halford E. Luccock, Paul Hutchinson, and Robert W. Goodloe, The Story of Methodism (New York: Methodist Book Concern, 1949), p. 168.

¹²Ibid., p. 27.

Employment of Group Dynamics Principles

Tremendous strides have been made in recent years. Religious educators, although they may not be members of the American Association of Group Workers, have assumed leadership in promoting interest in persons and training in the leadership groups. "You sit still while I instill" is no longer the way to teach. The emphasis now is upon educating the total person by means of a group experience which involves the total personality. The importance of secondary learning is noted. The impact of interpersonal relationships is studied. Field work with groups is required of students in religious education. Personal interest, involvement, and activity are declared to be essential to the learning experience; but the need for a point of view that is more group centered still persists. A committee recently set up by the American Association of Theological Schools to study the curricular offerings in seminaries has indicated that a minister must be trained to function as a leader of groups and not as a professional person who works alone.¹³

Some predecessors of group psychotherapy, especially those concerned with the most recent expressions of group psychotherapy (such as the marathon and the Gestalt experiences, which are loaded with emotional overtones) have revealed their concern with the religious revival movements in the United States, which have provided many platforms for the expression of emotional hangups. After all, one should realize that such expressions of emotion have to find a way out of the confines of

¹³Robert A. Edgar, "Groups Organized for Listening," International Journal of Religious Education, XLII (November 1965), 14-15, 46.

one's own personality; and in the context of time and place, it was perfectly legitimate to use those religious movements as an emotional vehicle. To be sure, this fact was not recognized by the participants and originators of those movements. On the contrary, any suggestion to this effect probably would have horrified them. It is interesting to note that ministers were instrumental in some of the early forms of group psychotherapy in this country. Elwood Worcester, the rector of the Emmanuel Church in Boston, advanced five hundred dollars to support tuberculosis classes conducted by Pratt. Eventually, Worcester and Samuel McComb founded the Emmanuel Church health classes, known as the Emmanuel Church Movement. Both of these clergymen were in turn helped by one of the first American psychoanalysts, Isadore Coriat. This movement eventually became the focus of a critical editorial in the journal of the New York State Medical Society. The editorial noted:

The Emmanuel Church Movement in Boston which has resulted in establishing a clinic for the treatment of functional nervous and mental disorders, under the directorship of an able pastor, Dr. Worcester, has assumed such serious proportions and has been widely exploited...¹⁴

Further, the editorial then criticized clergymen who treated nervous and mental disorders.

An interesting footnote might be that the Emmanuel Church Movement was placed in Boston, which was and is also the home of the Christian Science movement. Here too, religious people (in this case,

¹⁴"The Emmanuel Church Movement in Boston," New York: Medical Journal, LXXXVII (1908), 1047-48.

laymen) got involved in the treatment of physical and mental illness. And those who are familiar with the Christian Science testimonial Wednesday meetings know that a great deal of emotional discharge takes place in that setting with either positive or negative effect.

In all of this, we should realize that modern group psychotherapy has specific therapeutic aims; while for many of the revival and religious movements, this therapy was only a by-product.

In the history of group psychotherapy, it should be observed obviously that the subtle interchanges between human beings engaged in psychotherapy cannot be reduced to the structural concepts of transference-countertransference, which has finally caught on even among psychoanalysts. There have always been therapists who were prepared to demonstrate the unique interpersonal aspects of psychotherapy out of their own experience, but somehow their arguments were always beaten down by charges of unorthodoxy. If one were to hazard a guess as to what factors have brought this change of attitude, one should not omit the importance of the new interest in encounters.

It is safe to say that we are currently witnessing an epidemic of therapeutic encounters. Such encounters are sought not only in hospitals and clinics but also in university credit courses, in professional schools, in theaters, in new communities, and in a variety of so-called institutues. At times, the emphasis is on sensitivity training; but at other times, when people disrobe and discuss their bodies or when they are encouraged to fondle, massage, or touch one another, the emphasis seems to be rather on insensitivity training. Epidemics can occur only in a vulnerable population, and the vulnerability in

this instance seems to derive from the sense of isolation, disillusionment, and anomie which pervades in a particular way not necessarily the middle and upper classes but, in a broader sense, the educated classes. Most notably among the younger intelligentsia there is an intense longing for the intimacy that they have learned to expect as the culmination of identity. This is not to say that the current encounter epidemic is a new phenomenon, and here again we return to the history of group psychotherapy; only the language and some of the format are novel. Writing about Cincinnati in 1832, Frances Trollope described the revival, an encounter of the era:

When the room is full, the company, of whom a vast majority are always women, are invited, entreated, and coaxed to confess before their brothers and sisters all their thoughts, faults, and follies. These confessions are strange scenes; the more they confess, the more invariably are they encouraged and caressed.¹⁵

The difference between the revival meeting and marathon group therapy or the Living Theater or a weekend at one of the new institutes such as Esalen and other forms of therapeutic encounter are largely limited to ideology; otherwise, the quality of human experience is markedly similar.

As a matter of fact, the religious revival movement in the United States probably served for many years as a means through which many psychological pressures could be released. The simplicity of the revival phenomenon and its appeal not only to a black community but also to white rural communities is probably still very much with us.

¹⁵It is interesting to note that clergymen apparently, at least in this country, have been involved in the early origins of psychoanalysis and sociology. It is well known that many of the early pioneers in sociology were trained ministers.

What is new about small groups is that an activity which has characterized religious organizations in their most vital periods has now become an established pattern in the secular world. Carl R. Rogers calls the new enthusiasm for small groups "the most rapidly spreading social phenomenon in the country."¹⁶ These small groups are helping to break through the alienation and dehumanization of our culture. It is estimated that between sixty and seventy centers for encounter groups exist in the United States. The interest of the church in small groups is both a continuation of a pattern basic to most meaningful religious activity and a new recognition of the need for intimate groups in an impersonal, computerized age.

Marshall McLuhan, who writes so strongly of current trends in our technological culture, points out the faith dimension in the search for wholeness. The aspiration of our time for wholeness, empathy, and depth of awareness is a natural adjunct of electronic technology. We are suddenly eager to have things and people declare their beings totally. There is a deep faith to be found in this new attitude, a faith that concerns the ultimate harmony of all beings.

Along with the religious quest is a search for community. Members of the new communes report in a universal judgment that they have been taught everything except how to love together. One such member expressed concern about the fact that courses in anthropology and political science had contributed nothing to an understanding of people and the social process.

¹⁶Hendrik M. Ruitenbeek, The New Group Therapies (New York: Avon Books 1970), p. 45.

Over and over again in the literature dealing with small groups is a recognition of the need for relatedness to counteract the alienation of modern life. In speaking to this aspect of group life, Carl Rogers employs Martin Buber's concept of the I-Thou relationship.¹⁷

The intensive group experience appears to be one cultural attempt to meet the isolation of contemporary life. The person who has experienced an I-Thou relationship and who has entered into the basic encounter is no longer an isolated individual. One workshop member stated this premise in a deeply expressive way: "Workshop seems to be at least a partial answer to the loneliness of modern man and his search for new meaning for his life."¹⁸

Important Findings of the Study of Groups

1. Communication is going on at many levels. As defined by one specialist in communication, "No matter how one may try, one cannot communicate."¹⁹ Many research workers have been interested in what gets communicated nonverbally by a look, a touch, a shrinking away, or a moving toward. Many contemporary groups are experimenting with bodily awareness, attempting to develop greater freedom to communicate through physical touch.²⁰

¹⁷"Small Groups," Newsweek (May 12, 1969), 104.

¹⁸Martin Buber, I and Thou (Edinburgh: Clark 1953), p. 14.

¹⁹Paul Watzlawick, Janet Helmick Beavin, and Don D. Jackson, Pragmatics of Human Communication (New York: Norton, 1967), p. 49.

²⁰Cf. William C. Schults, Joy: Expanding Human Awareness (New York: Grove Press, 1967). Clyde Reid, "Non-verbal and Experimental Group Methods," in Groups Alive-Church Alive (New York: Harper & Row, 1969), p. 105-19.

2. Changes in behavior patterns are achieved more easily in groups than in individual counseling. Since most of the learning that takes place in groups is indirect, less resistance is encountered than in one-to-one personal counseling. Group members learn not only when their own behavior patterns are identified but even more when their own behavior is demonstrated in someone else's life. A father may have little appreciation for the ineffectiveness of his patterns of dealing with his son until he sees the almost total failure of another group member who employs the same tactics.

3. Changes in behavior can be accomplished without even discovering the underlying causes. Whatever the cause may be for effective interpersonal relationships, the actual behavior can be changed. What is needed is a supportive atmosphere, an awareness of the pattern, a challenge to change, and an opportunity to try out new patterns.

4. Effective groups are neither exclusively person oriented nor exclusively task oriented but combine features of both emphases. The journey inward is complemented by the journey outward and vice versa. Talking groups are not enough where action groups are called for.²¹

5. There is no set pattern for effective group work, nor is there a set pattern for the development of the life of a group. Rules on how groups are developed or how they live out their functions are as useless as are fixed rules for living.

²¹Reid, Ibid. Note, however, that people oriented to rational thought are especially resistant to the "touch and feel" approach in groups.

6. Leadership is important and often crucial, but leadership for small groups is not necessarily limited to professionals. Given a basically healthy approach to life, supplemented by actual experience as a group member and complemented by common sense guidelines, effective group work can be done by a wide range of nonprofessional people.

THEOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE OF CHURCH GROUPS

Priesthood of Believers

The Church group is a challenge to a more complete way of life. It is an invitation to move from self-centered self-sufficiency to a way of life in which meeting the needs of others becomes central.

To use Luther's term, each Christian is called to become a Christ to the other. For group members, this means that each group member is called to become a Christ to each other member. The incarnation becomes more than only a historic event; it becomes a living reality in the present. Group members assume a responsibility for one another as Christians which extends far beyond the structure of the group sessions. Love becomes incarnated in individual personal relationships.

To be a Christ to one another is no easy task. To accept responsibility for others is often more than one can handle. It is here that the small, sharing group provides particularly valuable support. Thomas Bennett reminds us that it is not only hard to be a Christian in general, but that "it is even more difficult to make responsible Christian choices if there is no place within the local church for an intimate sharing of the burdens, the joys, and the consequences of Christian

behavior."²² For the word truly to become flesh usually calls for a supportive community both to clarify and to reinforce personal commitment.

Community

A second theological concept expressed in groups is the conviction or realization of personal shortcoming. The essence of sin is an assertion of self-sufficiency, an affirmation that one does not need anyone else and that he does not need God.

Almost the first learning that comes out of a group experience is that no one can really manage a life alone.²³ Humans are inextricably related to fellowhuman beings and are dependent on them for support and challenge. This fact of inter-relatedness becomes amazingly clear in the life of the small group.

We may try to go it alone, but the fact of the matter quickly emerges: You can't be human alone. The contemporary emphasis in psychotherapy on dealing with an individual's problems in terms of the social context as expressed in family therapy and community psychiatry only underscores what the theological world has long insisted: it takes the community to be human. Paul Tillich makes the necessity for community very specific: "No personal being exists without communal being. . . .

²²Thomas R. Bennett, II, "Project Laity: Groups and Social Action," in John L. Casteel, (ed.) The Creative Role of Interpersonal Groups in the Church Today (New York: Association Press, 1968), p. 68.

²³Cf. Margaret E. Kuhn, "You Can't Be Human Alone" (New York: National Council of The Churches of Christ in the U.S.A., 1956), p. 20.

There is no person without an encounter with other persons. Persons can grow only in the communion of personal encounter.²⁴

In asserting the centrality of personal relatedness in the Christian enterprise, I recognize that I am ignoring a segment of religious thought that has stressed religion as an individual matter between a person and his/her God. William James, for example, is an able exponent of the solitary nature of the religious quest. James defines religion as follows: The feelings, acts, and experiences of individuals in their solitude as far as they apprehend themselves to stand in relation to whatever they may consider the divine.²⁵ Without denying the possibility of apprehending God in a direct mystical fashion, I am asserting that for most people in our culture today, the religious quest must involve a relationship with other humans. In New Testament terms, a gift offered at the altar cannot be seen as unrelated to the attitude the giver has toward fellow human beings.²⁶ Robert Raines reminds us that "most men in the modern world will discover the gracious God only in and through gracious neighbors."²⁷

A part of the reason that the group with therapeutic overtones is "right for now" is that a community is essential for personal growth.

²⁴Paul Tillich, Systematic Theology (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1951), I, 176-77.

²⁵William James, The Varieties of Religious Experience (London: Longmans, Green, 1920), p. 31.

²⁶Matthew 5:23-24

²⁷Robert A. Raines, Reshaping the Christian Life (New York: Harper & Row, 1964), p. 11.

Growth as a human being means growth in personal relatedness. Since the small group provides an unusual opportunity for enhancing personal relationships, it opens the door to even-increasing areas of relatedness, including the possibility of a relatedness with the ultimate dimensions of life. Sharing groups have as one of their chief characteristics the opening of gates for experiencing some ultimate external to one's self.

For many, the discovery of the absolute need for human relationships is the first step toward a recognition of the need for a relationship with God. The Hebraic idea of a covenant made by God and with God has no meaning apart from the idea of relationship. The covenant idea means to be a covenant with somebody. The covenant with God in which judgment, forgiveness, and reconciliation are experienced becomes an idea filled with meaning only when sin has been experienced in human life, followed by judgment, forgiveness, and reconciliation. The small group has the potential of highlighting this experience.

Grace

A third area of theological concern is found in grace, that powerful, mystical force that enables a person to grow in spite of human failings. Grace is closely related to acceptance.

There is probably no doctrine of the Christian faith harder to believe than the idea that a person is acceptable, not because of what one does but because of who one is. In order to be acceptable, the common tendency is to withhold anything of one's self that is not pleasant and desirable and attractive. But the small group provides

opportunity within the supportive trust that gradually builds up, to risk sharing even the dark aspects of one's life.

The point is that the small group members feel an acceptance in a way they have never experienced before, and the acceptance is not only of the nice parts of their lives but also of their whole being. There has never been a time in which the need for people to be in touch with their whole selves was greater than today! The electronic revolution has transformed our concepts of time and space. Even the remote corners of the earth are readily accessible through the air waves immediately and by plane in a matter of hours. When people are so easily in touch with one another all around the world, it is all the more urgent that they be in contact with themselves. George Leonard, in his book entitled Education and Ecstasy, speaks about "a world in which everyone will be in touch and needs people in touch with themselves."²⁸

Grace, which is unearned love, is virtually impossible to understand except as it has been experienced. When a person has felt accepted even when previous behavior did not warrant it, that person has begun to sense something of the meaning of what God's acceptance is like. The sharing group provides a natural medium for being a vehicle of acceptance which approximates the dimensions of grace.

²⁸George B. Leonard, Education and Ecstasy (New York: Delacorte Press, 1968), p. 127.

Crucifixion

A fourth theological concept that is experienced in the life of the group is crucifixion. Crucifixion is a way of dying to what was comfortable, a deliberate giving up of old patterns. It involves a death to the familiar way of life that new life may emerge.

When people speak of participation in a sensitivity group as a religious experience, they really are referring to a feeling of rebirth, to a dying of self and an affirming of new relationships. Reuel Howe reminds us of how lovers would like to avoid the pain of adjusting to each other, but, as he says, "The full meaning of their love cannot become available to them except as they pass through the challenge and crises of their relationship and die to themselves for the sake of the other."²⁹

For many Christians, crucifixion is only an event in history that climaxed the ministry of Jesus of Nazareth. But if crucifixion is to have meaning today, it needs to be seen not only as a historic event but also as a continuing experience. Crucifixion means that the forces working in life for good are being struck down constantly by the powers of evil, as experienced by Jesus. Crucifixion involves the recognition of hostility as a regular part of life which

²⁹Reuel L. Howe, Herein Is Love (Valley Forge: Judson Press, 1961), p. 83-84.

needs to be faced and dealt with and worked through.

There is no better place than in the small, sharing group for learning that crucifixion-like experiences can be the beginning of new life. Obviously the full meaning of crucifixion is not uncovered in the sharing group, but many hints about its contemporary relevance are discovered. Arch writes of the parallel between the sharing group with therapeutic overtones and the church:

We seldom realize that a therapeutic group is . . . like the church, a confessional community. Its members come laden with their own guilt, their own sense of inadequacy, their own feeling of estrangement from others, and their own need to reveal themselves and feel acceptance.

It is the guilts, the inadequacies, and the estrangements that create the interpersonal problems, that lead constantly to crucifixion. It is one of the privileges of the small group to demonstrate that hurts can be tolerated, that growth comes through pain, that dying leads to living, and that crucifixion is followed by resurrection.³⁰

Resurrection

A final area in which a theological concept is experienced in the small group is resurrection. Resurrection is the new birth that follows crucifixion. It is the new life that emerges out of the hurt of facing oneself, of dying to the old self and discovering a new self. The resurrection mood is the mood of expectancy and Christian hope.

³⁰Paul Tillich, "The Lost Dimensions in Religion," Saturday Evening Post (July 14, 1958), 29.

The concept of resurrection is especially difficult for the Christian of today to grasp. Many a person is completely turned off by the Apostles' Creed because of the sentence, "I believe in the resurrection of the body." Tillich reminds us how totally irrelevant the Christian faith seems to modern human beings if symbolic expression is taken as literal fact. He writes:

If the symbols of the Savior and the salvation through Him which point to the healing power in history and personal life are transferred to the horizontal plane, they become stories of a half-divine being coming from a heavenly place and returning to it. Obviously, in this form, they have no meaning whatsoever for people whose view of the universe is determined by scientific astronomy.³¹

Resurrection, however, is a symbol for the mood of hope, the note of expectancy, the affirmation of great, even seemingly impossible possibilities. It is an affirmation that new life can take form, that change can take place, that things can work out under even the most unlikely circumstances. It is the mood in which Viktor Frankl wrote when he chose as the title of a book the affirmation of a concentration camp song "Say 'Yes' to Life in Spite of Everything." It is the mood of the early Christians, whose confidence was based on their conviction that Christ, crucified but not contained by death, was in their midst empowering them for new ways of life.

³¹Elizabeth O'Connor, Journey Inward, Journey Outward (New York: Harper & Row, 1968), p. 75.

The small sharing group does not necessarily have a sense of the presence of Christ in its midst, but it does live out its life in the mood of expectancy. From almost the first session, the expectancy of change is indicated. Indeed, the current emphasis in some sensitivity groups on reaching the spirit through the body is on a reaffirmation of the symbolic significance of the resurrection of the body. The change that is expected is a total change: body, mind, and spirit united and working together as a newly integrated whole. Change is expected, and when it does take place, it is not only observed and spoken of but is also reinforced.

There is tremendous power in expectancy. Most of the help that comes through therapy would come because the patient expects to be helped. One of the significant findings from research in therapy is that therapeutic treatment takes about as long as the therapist expects it will! Short-term therapy produces good results only with those therapists who believe they can work effectively in a short span of time.

Unlike psychotherapy groups in which detailed analysis of past problems is often the order of the day, the sensitivity-type sharing group puts a premium on behavioral change. This is in the mood of psychiatrist Eric Bearne, who insisted that anyone can relearn how to call forth adult-like behavior. It is in the mood of Viktor Frankl, who speaks of the mood of Jesus at Jericho as he called forth

a new pattern of life from Zacchaeus.

There is a tremendous optimism in most small groups. In part, the optimism is the result of support that is felt from other fellow-sufferers. In part, it comes from a new freedom in communicating what is really being felt. In part, it comes from evidence of change seen in other group members which suggests the possibility for change in each group member. In part, it comes from the encouragement that is given by both the leader and the group members to hesitate beginning efforts at change.

Group Generates Self-Actualization

A measure of the value of the Christian actualization group is the involvement; and there are two primary dimensions of this involvement.

When the group is fulfilling its function, the members are warm, human, and interested in one another. This requires objectivity about one's self and subjectivity in expression and relationship. Too often the church has not provided the actualizing experience necessary for escape from the octopus-like tentacles of manipulation because of the absence of this personal element. When this is the case, the person in need of actualization finds himself a stranger among strangers. The spirit acts in our actualization groups to unlock the doors, to free us from alienation and estrangement through personal relationships open to the

spirit's working.

By this experience we know that we are known and accepted by God as we are. The limiting fear of self sharing is overcome; the need to remain hidden is eliminated. And no longer do we need to pretend. This kind of involvement means that each person in a group is in a position to hurt the others; and often, real hurt is necessary before we change. The wound has to be exposed before healing can come. The exposure of the wound is often the most painful experience.

The other essential dimension of involvement in the actualization group is authentic caring. This we distinguish from the love game that characterizes so many of our superficial relationships in the church. Pop culture bombards us with music extolling love as the cure for all of life's problems. Novelists stress that lack of love causes racial discrimination, sodomy, and murder. Love is offered as the cure for war. Hugh Hefner's philosophy equates love with sex, as does that of Helen Gurley Brown. Married men and women are given guilt feelings if they are not constantly in love twenty-four hours a day. Such false concepts of love cause more problems than they solve. In Christian actualization groups, authentic caring is substituted for these false concepts of love. This is done by replacing uncommitted casualness with intimate concern. Directness of expression, personal involvement, the shared power of

hurting and healing are not to be misconstrued as something soft and undemanding. For love to be redemptive and therapeutic, it has to be demanding and expectant. It must be remembered that active love sometimes requires expression of angry and hostile feelings as well as warm and loving feelings. The actualization process requires that conflict rather than simply passive acceptance be a part of the process. It may be that this is the one principle that has been missing from the small group movement of the church until now.

The journey of actualization requires death as well as rebirth, death to irrelevant modes of worship and service and to manipulative relationships. The process is not simply a once-and-for-all rebirth. Rather, it is a continuing rebirth where the old self is continually dying and the new self is constantly being born, discovered, and expressed.

The process of this continuous rebirth is akin to the process of continuous birth and death of cells in the body, which is required for growth of the body. Life is a melody which is produced by both the sounding and the silencing of individual notes. The greater life is not simply living but a process of both living and dying. The nature of being born is described by Erich Fromm:

Birth is not one act; it is a process. The aim of life is to be fully born, though its tragedy is that most of us die before we are thus born. To live is to be born every minute. Death occurs when birth stops. The other answer is to be fully born, to develop one's awareness,

one's reason, one's capacity to love, to such a point that one transcends one's own egocentric involvement and arrives at a new harmony, at a new oneness with the world.³²

One of the primary reasons for the improvement in my relationship and communication is my new understanding of the importance of feelings and emotions gained during the research for this paper and the courses in group dynamics at the School of Theology at Claremont. Prior to this experience, I believed that control of feelings and emotions was necessary, particularly for a man, since society dictates that a person should not let emotions play a significant part in actions or relationships. I believed that logic was the only thing on which a man could base decisions. Through the group, I was able to realize the tremendous importance of the feelings and emotions that I was persistently denying. As I came to the awareness that trying to ignore these strong forces in my life was damaging me and others, I began to change. I have been helped to express not only my safe feelings but also the feelings which I have desperately attempted to keep hidden.

³²D. T. Suzuki, Eric Fromm, and Richard Demartino, Zen Buddhism and Psychoanalysis (New York: Harper & Bros., 1960), p. 87-88.

Chapter 2

THE ENCOUNTER CULTURE

The layperson who knows nothing of encounter groups, i.e., groups, marathons, sensory awareness, etc., surely has been isolated from the main currents of American religious life of the past decade. With increasing acceleration in the last ten years, the encounter culture has spread from town to town, retreat center to retreat center, and church to church with such power that it is impossible to ignore it as a force in religious life, regardless of how one might evaluate it. Literally thousands of religious educators, pastors, laypersons, and youth have been introduced in one form or another to encounter groups.¹ Some laypersons have become conversant with encounter group techniques through their business training, whereas others have experienced the techniques through educational, civic, governmental, religious, or health care channels; but almost no one has been left untouched in some way by these techniques.

Advocates claim that these groups already are performing important corrective functions in our society, cutting through dishonesty, helping persons to develop better sensory contact with the world,

¹ M. P. Jackson, "Their Brother's Keeper: A directory of Therapeutic Self-Help Groups, International Communities, and Lay Training Center," (Department of Psychology, University of Illinois); John W. Drakeford, Farewell to the Lonely Crowd (Waco, TX: Ward Books, 1969); Walter O'Connell, "Psycho-therapy for Every Man," Journal of Existentialism, VII, 25 (Fall 1966); Hobart Mower, The New Group Therapy (New York: Van Nostrand, 1964), Chapter 2.

deepening the capacity for joy, and improving feedback procedures. The movement also has its share of critics who view the encounter culture as dangerous, irresponsible, fanatical, faddish, exhibitionist, and counter-productive.²

Sam Keen has used the term "soft revolution" to describe the "new secular religion" that emerged during the 1960s--electric, experiential, mystical and non-professional, a do-it-yourself kit composed of disciplines and insights drawn from many religious and occult traditions.³ Keen further states:

We are in the middle of two revolutions. One is hard, explosive and political. It is concerned primarily with the redistribution of political power and is committed to a strategy of direct confrontation. The other is soft, implosive and religious. It is concerned primarily with the alteration of consciousness, with erotic and mystical experience and with the resacralization of intimate relationships. The hard revolution finds its focus in the mergence of power groups - black, brown, and student. The soft revolution is diffuse and without organizational manifestations, but its visible outposts are the 'growth center' which have been modeled on the Esalen Institute.⁴

To much of the church laity, such things as sensory awareness, body affirmation, and sensitivity training are quite alien to the Christian faith and in fact very dangerous. Others who have actually been involved with these groups often testify to a deepening of their

²P. K. Greene, "Sensitivity Training: Fulfillment or Freakout?", Catholic World, CCXI (April 1970), 18-21; Phyllis Chesler, "Playing Instant Joy in the Lonely Crowd," Village Voice (December 25, 1969); R. Cox, "The Being Real Neurosis," Christian Century, LXXXV (July 17, 1968).

³Sam Keen "The Soft Revolution," Christian Century, LXXXIV (December 31, 1967), 1667; cf. Neil Postman, and Charles Weingartner, The Soft Revolution (New York: Dell, 1971).

⁴Keen, *ibid.*

religious sensitivities and experiences and to a hope that these processes might quicken the spirit of religious communities in our time. According to one study, most of the persons (ninety to ninety-eight percent) who have participated in encounter groups have indicated that they felt they benefited from the experience.⁵

Persons who have not experienced basic group encounter may wonder what is meant by the term "intensive group experience." The most concise statement of what happens in such groups has been made by Carl Rogers, who described in fifteen stages some personal interactions that frequently take place in encounter groups.⁶

1. Most groups begin with a period of polite surface interaction, some awkwardness, often frustration and confusion combined with bewilderment about who is in charge.

2. Persons show their public selves, or masks, while their private selves remain cautiously withdrawn. They wonder if the group can be trusted. There is a general resistance in the group to expression of feelings and a reliance on ritual behaviors.

3. Some past feelings may be cautiously expressed or described.

4. Negative feelings are expressed, often past oriented. Some current personal feelings may also be expressed at this stage. Often this takes the form of attacking the facilitator for not giving the kind

⁵J. T. Gibb, "The Effects of Human Relations Training," in A. E. Bergin and S. L. Garfield (eds.) Handbook of Psychotherapy and Behavior Change (New York: Wiley, 1970), p. 2114-2176.

⁶Carl R. Rogers, On Encounter Groups (New York: Harper & Row, 1970), p. 14 ff.; cf. B. W. Tuckman, "Developmental Sequence in Small Groups," Psychological Bulletin, VI (1963, 384-399; Betty Meador, "An Analysis of Process Movement in a Basic Encounter Group" (unpublished Ph.D. Dissertation, United States International University, 1969).

of guidance that was expected. This is the point when persons begin to ask and find out whether this is a place where "here and now" negative feelings can be expressed without disastrous results, and how they are dealt with.

5. If negative feelings can be negotiated, the group moves on to the exploration of personally meaningful materials. There is an increasing realization that the group is "our group," and that we can make of it what we wish.

6. "Here and now" feelings toward others in the group, both positive and negative, are more fully expressed.

7. In response to these expressions, group members often show a remarkable spontaneous capacity for dealing helpfully and constructively with the pain and suffering of others. Rogers remarks:

"This kind of ability shows up so commonly in groups that it has led me to feel that the ability to be healing or therapeutic is far more common in human life than we suppose. Often it needs only the permission granted--or freedom made possible--by the climate of a free flowing group experience to become evident."

8. Increased self-acceptance ensues--a sense that it is all right to be me, to feel my feelings.

9. This is often followed by the cracking of facades and impatience with defenses. During this phase, the group may make it difficult for some of its members to continue to live behind masks. Gently at times, almost savagely at others, the group demands that the individuals be themselves, that their current feelings not be hidden,

⁷Rogers, p. 10.

that they remove the mask of ordinary social intercourse.

10. Feedback is received from others. One learns how one appears to others.

11. Confrontation occurs. Painful or difficult conflicts with others are expressed and renegotiated.

12. The helping relationship continues outside the group sessions, with group members often giving of themselves deeply to assist each other.

13. Rogers uses the term "basic encounter" to describe the mature stage of group encounter where persons feel completely with and for others, where negative feelings are fully expressed and embraced by deeper feelings of acceptance. Persons experience each other in "I-thou" relationships or relationships where persons are fully prized as persons and not treated as things or objects.

14. The expression of positive feelings and closeness to others is thus made possible in a new way.

15. Positive behavioral changes result from these interactions.

The impact of the movement is so great that many people are just at the point of considering whether it is possible to be faithful to the Christian tradition; or whether the human potential movement is something that has to go on completely apart from or against the Christian community.

Religious institutions have been quick to adopt the encounter group as a part of their programs. Such groups have been widely used in seminaries, with groups of religious leaders, with members of Roman Catholic religious orders, and with parishioners in the churches.

By and large, the main purpose in a religious institution is to build the sense of community which is so often missing in present day churches, to involve the parishioners in real participation in their own religious thinking and development, and to improve communication between pastors and parishioners, trustees and parishioners, and the older and younger generations in the church.

Christianity and the encounter culture deserve to be in serious dialogue. This does not mean that the church should become a growth center, although in some cases that needs to be tried experimentally. Nor does it mean that the encounter process should become saturated with overt, traditional, religious imagery. Let it be what it is as a secularized movement, relating realistically to where people are. But its secularizing momentum deserves to be in a richer dialogue with the wisdom of the Christian tradition that spawned it.

Now, the question is, to what degree does the rapidly spreading movement of group encounter lend itself to accommodation to the Judeo-Christian tradition and to practical utilization in the reshaping of worship, corporate life, adult education, pastoral care, and spiritual formation?

Chapter 3

THE DEMYTHOLOGIZING OF PIETISTIC ENCOUNTER

A highly mobile, charismatic itinerancy was the prevalent model for ministry in frontier American pietism. Faced with a frontier in constant flux not unlike our temporary society, these itinerant, charismatic leaders moved constantly on horseback from small lay group to small lay group in the process of facilitating their growth. Energized by visions of vast and rapid human change, armed with eclectic resources, and fascinated by experimental social interaction, they were accustomed to brutally honest feedback procedures.¹

The social conditions to which the encounter culture is responding are almost identical to the conditions which Protestant and Jewish pietism were protesting.² Rogers correctly observes that the small group movement has grown up entirely outside the establishment. Most universities still look upon it with scorn. The established professions of clinical psychology and psychiatry have stayed aloof, while the political right wing is certain that it

¹For information concerning frontier American pietism, see Warren G. Bennis and Philip E. Slater, The Temporary Society (New York: Harper & Row, 1968); William W. Sweet, Methodism in American History (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1933); Francis Asbury, Journals, 3 vols. (New York: Lane and Scott, 1852); H.M. Muhlenberg, The Journals of Henry Muhlenberg, 3 vols. (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1942-1958).

²Martin Schmidt and Wilhelm Jannasch (eds.) Das Zeitalter des Pietismus (Bremen: Schunemann, 1965); F.E. Stoeffler, The Rise of Evangelical Pietism (Leiden: Brill, 1965); John T. McNeill, Modern Christian Movements (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1954)

represents a deep-seated communist plot. Each of these features has its parallel in the anti-establishment mentality of left wing experiential pietism, which was looked upon with deep suspicion in its day by the Lutheran, Anglican, and Jewish religious establishment, and by the universities. In some cases it was literally driven out of the land because of its seemingly radical character. It, too, was interpreted as an extremist plot against common order.

Hasid refers to the righteous or the pious. Hasidism, the Jewish form of pietism, arose among remote Polish and Ukranian Jewish communities in the eighteenth century and is remarkably similar to the spirit of Protestant pietism. It, too, was not primarily concerned with correct dogma or ritual but with the actual appropriation of the life of faith in community.

By the eighteenth century, Judaism was ready for a reaction against certain ascetic forms of rabbinical orthodoxy that emphasized fasting, penance, and spiritual sadness. Hasidism was a response to the desire of ordinary people for a joyful, emotively satisfying faith applied practically in a social context. The aim of Hasidism was not to change belief but to change the believer. Concrete experiencing in the here and now was more important than abstract conceptualizing.³

³Gershom G. Scholem, "Personality Takes the Place of Doctrine," in his Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism (New York: Schocken Books, 1941), p. 344; Louis I. Newman, The Hasidic Anthology (New York: Bloch, 1944); Martin Buber, Hasidism (New York: Philosophical Library, 1948); Martin Buber, Tales of the Hasidism, 2 vols. (New York: Schocken Books, 1948); Martin Buber (ed) Ten Rungs: Hasidic Sayings (New York: Schocken Books, 1947).

A prominent feature of all forms of pietism, as well as of the current encounter culture, is the concept of a spiritual breakthrough of intense emotive depth that changes behavior radically. The literature of pietism is filled with testimonials of persons who have undergone sudden and radical conversion experiences.⁴ Typically, after having first experienced themselves as being crushed by guilt and despair, they then describe how, within a supportive group, a radical turning point is experienced in which they feel deeply the acceptance and grace of God, whereupon a rich flow of gratitude and freedom motivates them to reshape their behavior. This is the center of the pietistic conversion experience, revealed best by John Wesley's feeling his heart "strangely warmed" when an assurance was given him that "Christ had taken away my sins, even mine."

In probing these striking similarities, I am not arguing that modern group process leaders have been overtly or covertly reading the literature of Protestant or Jewish pietism. The fact that they would not wish to be caught dead doing so, however, interests me immensely. A curious part of the task of historical inquiry is to show why they have preferred not to behold their own history, and why they have not analyzed the subtle and indirect forms in which they have unself-consciously reappropriated and transmitted an available religious

⁴Paul Althaus, "Die Bekehrung in reformatorischer und pietistischer Sicht," Neue Zeitschrift für systematische Theologie, I (1955), 3-25; W. G. Bodamer, "Some Features of Pietistic Biography," Theologische Zeitschrift, XVII (November-December 1961), 435-437; S. G. Dimond, The Psychology of the Methodist Revival (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1926).

tradition. These pietistic patterns were quietly and inertly present as available social models for the progenitors of current group encounter such as Lewin, Moreno, Rogers, and the innovators of the National Training Laboratories.⁵ The fact that they were borrowed and applied unconsciously rather than consciously is noteworthy, to say the least, especially among therapists so deliberately committed to making the unconscious conscious.

The reductionist impression must be avoided that current encounter group processes can be boiled down essentially to what was taking place in the eighteenth century religious societies. Rather, I am trying to unveil the striking similarities between the two movements; and, in a modest way, to hypothesize that there may be some discernible flow of influence from the pietistic encounter style to the current encounter style.

Jewish and Protestant pietism have both been, like current encounter groups, highly syncretistic movement. Wesley's movement, for example, was a practical synthesis of Puritan and Angelican traditions of faith and practice and communal life. Few parts of the synthesis were original with him, but his putting them together in a practical focus, easily implemented in small groups, was a unique and gifted contribution.⁶ Likewise, it is of the essence of the encounter culture today that it is syncretistic, putting a broad range of change

⁵William G. McLoughlin, "Pietism and the American Character," American Quarterly, XVII, 2½ (Summer 1965), 163ff.

⁶John Wesley, The Letters of the Rev. John Wesley, 8 vols. (London: Epworth Press, 1931).

strategies together into a working, practical synthesis of resources for human growth in small groups.

Why People Tend to Join a Group

One is most likely to join and give oneself to a group if one believes that one is joined in spirit to his fellow beings. The person who holds to a philosophy of naturalism tends to consider oneself a mere thing and all other persons as objects or things. As such, a person cannot really respect and honor personality. One expects only to record impressions and stimulate as other objects contact him; one sees persons as part of one's environment which must be subdued and over which that person must have dominion.

But persons who believe that they are essentially spirit beings and part of a superordinate whole join a group in order to achieve interpersonal relationships with others who also have a spiritual dimension to their being. As Angyal says:

When two persons love one another, they clearly or dimly have the feeling that something greater is involved than their limited personalities, that they are one in something greater than themselves or as the religious persons says, they are one in God.⁷

The mystic tries to soar to communion with an infinite spirit by solitary flight, but this is a solitary, lonely thing. As Buber says, "We accept theophany of which we know nothing but the place,

⁷Andras Angyal, "A Theoretical Model for Personality Studies," Journal of Psychology, XXI, 133 (Summer 1957), 65-72.

and the place is called community."⁸ God is met best among followers. Jung calls this "the racial unconscious," this common spiritual quality of life which all human beings share and which will not be denied nor ignored. Mankind seeks community with another person because others are seen as an extension of one's own concreteness. It is with others as it is with oneself. There is the possibility of deep, flashing subverbal dialogue between them. There can be mutuality and reality between them. They can enter an I-thou relationship.⁹ One is able to meet a fellow human being with one's total existence and as a spirit being.

Judaism had fostered an intense sense of interrelatedness and community. It developed what might be called a corporate personality. A man was so intensely related to his brother that it was his duty to avenge his brother.¹⁰ He accepted punishment for his brother's sin.¹¹ Innocent persons were punished if the head of a household sinned, as seen in the case of Achan.¹² Because a man was regarded as so nearly identical with his brother, levirate marriage was practiced.¹³ A parent exercised the right of absolute disposal of a child, as

⁸Martin Buber, Between Man and Man (London: Paul Kegan, 1947, p. 7.

⁹Ibid., p. 98.

¹⁰II Sam. 14:7.

¹¹II Sam. 21:1-14.

¹²Joshua 7:24.

¹³Deut. 25:5.

illustrated by Abraham and Isaac,¹⁴ or Reuben offering his sons as hostages.¹⁵ The later prophets asserted individual responsibility, but the feeling of mutual responsibility and interrelatedness remained intense.

In the early New Testament period, the feeling of community and oneness was so intense that to break it meant death, as in the case of Ananias.¹⁶ The young converts at Corinth evidently expected that to excommunicate one of their number might mean his death: "Deliver such an one unto Satan for the destruction of the flesh."¹⁷ In II John, Christians are exhorted not to eat with or bid God speed to persons who have broken fellowship with the group.

The emphasis upon the intense sense of community that exists among a Christian group continues throughout the New Testament, but the stress is upon the healing, helping power of group life rather than upon how it should expel nonconformists or avenge one another's wrongs. Redemptive love is the dominant characteristic of New Testament group life.

Many Christian leaders have sensed the possibility of depth level participation in the life of a brother. John Woolman wrote:

A concern arose to spend some time with the Indians, that I might feel and understand their life, and the spirit they live in; if happily I might receive some instruction from them, or they be

¹⁴Gen. 22:1.

¹⁵Gen. 42:37.

¹⁶Acts 5:4.

¹⁷I Cor. 5:5.

in any degree helped forward by my following the leadings of truth amongst them.¹⁸

A number of Christian educators embrace this point of view.

Ross Snyder says:

My own guiding image as I participate in group life--wavering as is my hold on the vision of this; that a Christian lives within the constant expectation of the coming of the Kingdom of God. He knows that there is a depth to every human relation; in that depth are hidden the potentialities of the Kingdom of God, and they will break forth in power if he can only sense their presence, and by this behavior invite their coming.¹⁹

Christian group members realize that only thinkers and persons who really believe that they are essentially spiritual beings will be drawn to their group because of this dynamic.

Definition of Group

According to Krech and Crutchfield, a group refers to two or more people who bear an explicit psychological and spiritual relationship to one another. Each person is related to others in such a way that the behavior and characteristics of others influence him.

Casteel describes the group as:

Two or more organisms interacting in the pursuit of a common goal in such a way that the existence of many is utilized for the satisfaction of some needs of each member. Also, each member remains in contact with all others, with an open readiness to modify his ideas and attitudes as his perception changes. Willingness of each member to listen, try to understand, to consider

¹⁸H. Wheeler Robinson, The Christian Doctrine of Man (Edinburgh: Clark, 1911), p. 29.

¹⁹Ross W. Snyder, "Members One of Another," International Journal of Religious Education, XXXIII (May 1957), 9.

a statement from another on its merits, and to draw conclusions based on the evidence presented rather than on performed values.²⁰

According to Freud, two or more people constitute a psychological group if they have set up the same model object (leader) or ideals in their superego or both, and consequently have identified with each other. Redl postulated that group formation occurs also when several individuals have used the same objects as a means of relieving similar internal conflicts. Furthermore, the leader might be an object of identification on the basis of the group member's love for him or fear of him--an object of the group member's love or aggressive drives or both. As a result of these common ties to the leader, all of which might operate in any one group, the affective bonds among the individual come into being.²¹ Other psychologists have focused attention upon the gratification that members derive from belonging to a group. They argue that unless a collection of people in their relationships provide some degree of satisfaction to each member, the collection will not remain a distinctive social entity.

The motivational aspects of groups have also been stressed by Deutsch²² in a careful analysis of cooperative inter-relations. He assumes that individuals have goals, the attainment of which may depend upon the actions of others; and he distinguishes two types of

²⁰John L. Casteel (ed.) Spiritual Renewal Through Personal Groups (New York: Association Press, 1957), p. 79.

²¹Sigmund Freud, Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego (London: Hogarth Press, 1948), p. 42.

²²William C. Schultz, Joy, Expanding Human Awareness (New York: Grove Press, 1967), p. 10.

such motivational interdependence, which he labels "promotive" and "contrient." According to Deutsch, two people are promotively interdependent if the progress of each toward his goal makes it more likely that the other will reach his goal. They are interdependent if one's progress reduces the likelihood that the other will attain his desired goal.

Growth Groups in the Church

Life can flourish on our planet, among nations, and in our cities and institutions only if we say "yes" to the life within us. Growth groups are instruments for enlivening individual and group relationships. They are human potential groups, designed to help us discover and use more of our latent resources. The term "growth group" describes any group with the following characteristics:

1. A dominant purpose is the personal growth of participants, emotionally, interpersonally, intellectually, and spiritually.
2. A growth facilitating style of leadership is used, first by the designated leader and gradually by the entire group so that the group itself becomes an instrument of growth.
3. The growth orientation is the guiding perspective; the emphasis is more on unused potential, here-and-now effectiveness in living, and future goals than on past failures, problems, and pathology.
4. The group is composed of relatively functional people so that its aim is making well people better.
5. It is small enough to allow group trust and depth relationship to develop.
6. There is a two-way movement from personal feelings to relevant content, and it blends group counseling and person-centered education.

7. Applying learning from group experiences to relationships outside the group is encouraged as an essential part of personal growth.
8. The group encourages constructive changes in both attitudes and feelings on the one hand and in behavior and relationships on the other.²³

When a person learns to use one's latent resources, it often becomes unnecessary to deal in depth with one's own pathology. One may become a more effective person without having to cope extensively with one's hangups from the past. Viable hopes and plans for the future can pull a person as insistently as one's past pushes that person. In growth groups, the growth perspective is central. It functions like a pair of eyeglasses, permitting the leader and group members to see each other in terms of what they can become.

A person whose growth has been stifled for years often cannot respond to an unmodified growth approach until psychotherapy is used in everyday relationships and groups to nurture growth. The most effective forms of therapy today focus on both healing and growth.

A good growth group aims at a balanced emphasis on the three interdependent dimensions of human development--inreach, outreach, and upreach. Inreach refers to growth in awareness--coming alive to oneself. The walls between us are extensions of the walls within us. Inreach means relating responsibly and responsively to oneself--taking one's own feelings and needs seriously. Outreach means relating

²³The term "encounter group" refers to one type of growth group. I prefer "growth group" because the term describes the purpose and orientation of the group rather than a primary means--encountering by which it is achieved. "Growth group" as used herein includes more types of groups than usually covered by the term "encounter group."

responsibly and responsively to others. It involves developing a life style of "generativity"--psychoanalyst Erik Erikson's apt term for generating life in the ongoing stream of society--living in terms of the growth needs of the family of man. Upreach refers to growth of a stronger, more trustful connection with the vertical dimension--with the Source of all life and growth. Attention to upreach growth is just as vital in a school or secular group as in church or temple. Vertical issues are not just the concern of churches. They are the profoundly human issues that face us all at all times.

Chapter 4

SOURCES OF GROWTH IN GROUPS

Growth groups aim at helping each person discover and proceed along an individual and unique road. Within an atmosphere that values aliveness and permits it to blossom, the individual finds growth directions which are in some ways as unique as fingerprints. But human needs are similar enough that group members usually empathize with each other's goals. The young man who declared passionately, "I want to stop plodding and fly for a change!" found the whole group resonating to his aspirations.

In a frequently reprinted article, "Are You Alive?"¹ Stuart Chase distinguished between "living" and "existing." He was living, he says, when he experienced love, friendship, danger, play, laughter, art, food when hungry, sleep when tired, the mountains, sea, and stars. In contrast, he existed only when his lot was drudgery or attending social functions or experiencing ugliness and monotony. He found that he had lived only 40 of the 168 hours available to him in the previous week. How about the past week in your life? The purpose of growth is to improve the ratio on the side of living.

Within everyone is an impulse to develop one's potentialities. This drive is our fundamental resource in education, counseling, and growth groups. The teacher's, counselor's, and group leader's most indispensable skill is the ability to awaken this drive. Some people

¹Stuart Chase "Are You Alive?" Newsweek (June 23, 1965), 37.

have squelched the growth urge for so long that they are oblivious to it. The drive continues to express itself, however, in vague restlessness, in general apathy, or in the guilt-depression-anger syndrome that results from dammed-up growth.

The growth drive is stimulated or blocked by the quality of relationships. Growth occurs in a relationship in which there is mutual feeding of the basic heart and hungers--the hunger for love, affirmation, freedom, pleasure, adventure, and meaning. Shallow, manipulative intent blocks growth and damages self-esteem. If such I-it relationships dominate one's early life, the growth drive becomes encrusted in defensiveness and fear; resistance to growth becomes intense. Growth-stimulating relationships are warm, caring, and trustful at the same time that they are honest, confronting, and open. Caring + confrontation = growth! This is the growth formula.

Growth is an inner fulfillment and unfolding. Growth-producing relationships nurture and release an inner process; manipulation or attempts to coerce the person to change do not produce growth. The patterns and direction of growth reflect the person's individuality. Growth results from discovering, affirming, and rejoicing in who one truly is, rather than pursuing an idealized image of what one should be. Becoming takes place by being.

Growth is an experience of the whole person in many areas--feelings, behavior, attitudes, relationships. Changes in any area often trigger changes in other areas. By choosing to use your present freedom to relate to others more authentically and responsibly, you

enhance your self-esteem. By choosing to be true to yourself now, you help create your future.

The small sharing group is the ideal arena for deepening relationships and consequently accelerating growth. To continue growing, every person requires a depth relationship with at least one other human being. A small network of depth relationships is even better. The group is an interpersonal laboratory for testing and learning better ways of relating. It provides a place to do one's "growth work"--that essential struggle to let go of costly but comfortable defenses against growth--and to find and own one's self.

Small group methods are most effective with relatively whole people whose growth impulses are active and accessible. These are people who, in Abraham Maslow's terms, are motivated at least as strongly by self-actualization trends as by deficiency needs.² Those with intense deficiency needs require therapy; those with a predominance of self-actualization needs respond to growth-oriented methods. The pain of deficiency provides the push of therapy; the pull of self-actualization tendencies is a major motivation for growth. Relatively healthy people have sufficiently gratified their basic needs so that their self-actualization or growth drives can function freely. Growth motivated people experience growth in itself as a rewarding, exciting process.

²Abraham J. Maslow, Toward a Psychology of Being (Princeton: Van Nostrand, 1962), Chapter 3, "Deficiency Motivation and Growth Motivation."

The growth-facilitating style of leadership can be learned by anyone who is relatively open to self and to others or who is willing to undergo therapeutic and growth experiences to become so.

Institutions become viable to the degree that they provide opportunities for human growth and fulfillment. Renewal in churches, schools, and agencies will occur only as they become human development centers!

Responsibility Toward Growth Groups

Churches should play a strategic part in the growth network needed to develop the unused human potential in every community. No other institution in American life has regular, face-to-face contacts among so many millions of adults. The small group approach is a "natural" in the church, undergirded by a long tradition. The right of each person to develop his full potential as a child of God is basic in the Judeo-Christian heritage. Many church leaders, clergy, and laity are discovering the power of groups for implementing this right. Robert Leslie, a pioneer in using small groups in the church, reports:

An increasing number of people are finding new meaning in the church life through small sharing groups. More and more ministers are finding a new focus for the ministry in developing group life.³

Relevant churches have a three-pronged mission: to heal brokenness, to nurture growth, and to equip (train, coach, educate, inspire) change/growth agents to help individuals and to create a more

³Robert C. Leslie, Leadership in Sharing Groups (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1971), p. 7.

humanizing society. Growth groups are useful to each of these thrusts.

I concur with George Webber's conviction that a congregation in mission "will make basic provision for its members to meet in small groups, not as a sidelight or option for those who like it but as a normative part of its life."⁴ A viable motif for the church in the last third of the century is found in words attributed to Jesus in John's Gospel: "I have come that men may have life . . . in all its fullness."⁵ To implement this motif in mission, a church must become a human wholeness and training center.

Churches have several unique advantages and resources which can be utilized in growth groups. Since all eight life stages are represented in a congregation, there is a splendid opportunity to develop a full ladder of growth groups. Small groups can help people prepare for normal, developmental crises and cope with unexpected, accidental crises. The vertical orientation of the church fellowship defines another unique resource: an explicit concern for nurturing spiritual growth by helping people develop functional adult values and philosophies of life and thereby strengthen their connection with the Source of life and growth. Spiritual growth involves deepening one's sense of "at-homeness" in the universe and increasing one's awareness that "I'm O.K.; you're O.K.' God's O.K." God is very dead for many people. The concept refers to no reality in their actual experience.

⁴George Webber, The Congregation in Mission (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1964), p. 116-17.

⁵John 10:10, NEB.

God can be revived for them only in relationships where theological truths become experiential realities. This situation can occur in growth groups. At the close of two weeks of daily growth group sessions, participants in one workshop could identify these biblical themes in their shared experiences: bondage and liberation, salvation by grace, judgment, death and rebirth, alienation and reconciliation, mutual caring, the transforming power of love, becoming a spiritual unity, and growth.

Church groups can contribute to spiritual growth by utilizing basic insights from their heritage. This heritage holds that people are more than "a larger white rat or a slower computer;"⁶ it is freedom, awareness, valuing, caring, and creativeness that constitute the core of their humaneness. These spiritual aspects (called the "image of God" in traditional language) make us human. Growth in these aspects increases our humanity. From the religious perspective, human potentializing is not so simple as the means by which an acorn becomes an oak. A person takes part in creating or distorting one's own future; this is to a degree self-determination.

The human potentials movement needs emphasis of the Hebrew-Christian tradition (and of Freud) on humanity's powerful tendencies to resist, block, and distort the growth drive. Simplistic growth models such as unfolding flowers are deceptively attractive but inadequate when applied to the complexities of human life. The recognition

⁶James Bugental (ed.) The Challenges of Humanistic Psychology (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1967), p. vii.

that "dying" precedes rebirth is a valuable part of ancient Christian wisdom (expressed symbolically by crucifixion preceding resurrection). In groups, this truth becomes experiential just as the painful dying of life-constricting defenses and patterns of relating precedes rebirth to more intimate, vital relationships. From their heritage, church groups should be aware that all growth is ultimately a gift and a mystery. Grace we do not earn; it is the gift of God which produces growth. Forgetting this fact, infatuation with our techniques can make them sterile and manipulative. A sense of the ultimate mystery of all life and all relationships should remind church groups that there are no psychological answers to the deepest dimensions of any human problem. For the normal anxiety and existential loneliness which are an inescapable part of man's self-awareness, only spiritual and philosophical answers satisfy.⁷ To help persons find these is that part of a growth group's task to which a church group brings unique resources.

Stages in the Life of a Group

Every group and every individual has a unique life history and identity. There are, however, some typical stages through which growth groups tend to go in developing as environments of renewal.⁸

⁷Howard J. Clinebell, Jr., Growth Groups (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1971), p. 31.

⁸Thomas R. VERNY, Inside Groups: A Practical Guide to Encounter Groups and Group Therapy (New York: McGraw Hill, 1974), p. 114.

Stage 1: Initial anxiety, testing, and attempts at connecting.

In the early meetings there is considerable defensiveness, testing of each other and the leader, and attempts to relate in some meaningful way. To reduce their anxieties about human relationships, some members usually push the leader to take over the group. If the facilitator falls into this trap, the group will remain leader-dependent and never become a growth group. The leader can introduce enough structure--e.g., content material, a brief lecture, or awareness exercise--to reduce anxiety and stimulate interaction, provided it is used in a group-centered manner. The discussion about what each person wants and expects from the group and the decisions about guidelines move the group toward a sense of cohesion and common purpose. In the early sessions, members usually focus on problems rather than potential. The leader, in each stage, affirms unused strengths and resources in individuals and in the group as a whole. However, there can be little depth-sharing and mutual growth-stimulation until stronger group rapport develops.

Stage 2: The honeymoon. The dominant feelings at this stage are euphoria and enjoyment of group camaraderie. One elated group member exclaimed, "It's great to have a place where you can let your hair down, be honest about your hangups, and know others are in the same boat!" Actually, the relatedness experience at the start is only a foretaste of the caring of a mature growth group. Most of the feelings expressed during the honeymoon stage are warm and positive. Members luxuriate in the warming awareness that their painful loneliness

is being invaded by people.

Stage 3: Frustration and questioning. In this stage there may be a spirit of group depression, flatness, and disillusion. This frustration phase is more or less intense, depending on the group. These feelings stem from reluctance to risk going deeper, resistance to owning the group, and anxiety about trusting the group with one's real pain. What seemed easy during the honeymoon now looks flat, difficult, and even impossible. Anger surfaces toward the leader who "doesn't lead," at least not in the way we want when we are anxious. The leader may discourage dropouts by mentioning that some may feel like "bailing out." The leader's most important function is to help the group reflect critically on its own mood and interaction, to express negative feelings openly, and to re-evaluate the goals of the experience with a no-holds-barred honesty. The struggle, conflict, and questioning are the narrow gate through which groups must go to achieve intimacy and become an environment for growth. The leader should not try to rescue the group or attempt to cheer up the members. The leader's efforts should be directed toward helping them face rather than run from group conflict and frustration. In struggling together, they will discover how difficult it is to connect in depth with other human beings; yet they will take joint steps toward achieving such relationships individually and as a group. This stage is a clear illustration of the principle that growth involves struggle and pain. Old patterns of defensiveness and distancing must die before new closeness can be born.

Stage 4: Risking and trusting. Gradually, some members begin to risk openness by sharing their disappointments, their pain, and their dim hopes for change. Their openness is a catalyst encouraging others to drop their facades. Communication moves to a new level; both caring and confrontation are given and received. Members discover that they can trust the group and risk being open; when they do, they experience the acceptance of the group supporting and warming them. Group ownership is firming up. The group will attempt to complete itself by drawing in silent members gradually. Most if not all members experience sufficient trust to take the leap toward honest sharing, discovering therein the key to deeper relationships. Members and leader can point to the growth-blocking attitudes and behavior which prevent the use of potential. The group has now reached the level when collaborative "growth work" can be undertaken wholeheartedly with group support.

Stage 5: Effective growth work. Changes in individuals and in relationships begin to occur during stage 4; they flourish in stage 5. Members work to help one another move toward growth goals. Progress and breakthroughs are rewarded by affirming group responses. Spontaneous cheers and handclapping are not unusual. These group affirmations of growth help to stabilize new self-images and behavior. Changes in self-esteem are reflected in statements such as, "You see me as worthwhile and you know more about my messy side than anyone It's easier to like myself." Behavior and relationship growth is also evident. In marriage groups, couples begin to report that

they have been able to get through their inner walls between sessions, interrupt self-defeating behavior, and remain friends longer. Group members who did not set realistic goals initially are now confronted firmly by a group that cares enough not to look the other way while they live at a fraction of their potential. Leadership-facilitator functions are now shared widely within the group. Concern for others' growth is now implemented by skills learned mainly from the leader's ways of relating. Mutual growth-work is radically different from the superficial problem-solving of early sessions, described by a group member as "everyone playing Mr. Fix-It to keep the group away from him."

Because group ownership is well established, the leader can now function increasingly well as a group member. If necessary, the leader can deal with personal loneliness and growth needs. I am assuming that the leader has related as a human being with the full range of feelings from the beginning. Now, the leader and the group will be helped if the leader participates fully in mutual growth work.

At any stage, but particularly now, the group or the leader may suggest renegotiating the original covenant. In the birth of awareness and new behavior, new growth needs and goals have become evident. Ups and downs will continue to occur in the group's climate and interaction. In fact, a plateau often will be reached following an emotionally intense session.

Stage 6: Closing. Terminating a group should be a gradual, growth-productive process. In each of several sessions before the end,

the group should be reminded of how much time is left and asked how members feel about this. Raising this issue usually triggers growth-work that members have been resisting. A group which has achieved a sense of caring and community approaches termination with grief feelings. Coping with these in the group produces growth in the ability to live constructively with the series of losses which is an inescapable part of life.

The Leader's Functions

The key to group success is the nature and the quality of its leadership. The leader brings know-how to the group as a resource for doing the following things, as suggested by Thomas R. Verny:

1. Facilitating the growth of individual members.
2. Developing a group climate and style of relating which release individual members and the group as a growth stimulating organism.
3. Continuing his own growth, Carl Jung once suggested that the test of an effective psychotherapeutic relationship is whether or not it produces change in both the therapist and the patient. Most patients look for the following qualities in their therapists:
 - a. Expert - Some seek a detached scientist who will have all the answers and either tell patients what to do or manipulate them so cleverly that they will automatically do the right thing. Patients with these fantasies often ask for psychoanalysis, hypnosis, drugs, or behavior therapy.
 - b. Parent - Some are expecting to find an indulgent parent who will coddle and support them and be very gentle. Others are looking for a punitive parent who will break through their defenses, find out how bad they really are, and punish them for their transgressions.

- c. Friend - Some patients want to prove that they are just as bright and successful as the therapist, that they are equal, and that they could be friends.
- d. Lover - By trying to involve the therapist sexually, some patients hope to feel reassured about their sexuality. Short of sexual relations, men want to learn from a male therapist how to be more masculine; women, by feeling desired, how to be more feminine.⁹

These categories are not as distinct in people's minds as I have outlined. More often than not, patients are looking for a combination of qualities in their therapists.

The group leader's knowledge of self and others can be enhanced with interaction through awareness exercises. William Schutz reports:

Talking is usually good for intellectual understanding of personal experience, but it is effective for helping a person to experience and to feel. Combining the nonverbal with the verbal seems to create a much more powerful tool for cultivating human growth.¹⁰

Awareness exercises can help us rediscover immediate experiencing and get beyond the use of words and intellectualizing to pretend, keep distance, control, and hide. The exercise can help us get in touch with forgotten feelings and sensations. Most of us were programmed in childhood to ignore many rich and powerful sensual feelings within our bodies. These disowned feelings have a destructive effect on our bodies, our spirits, and our relationships. Owned and welcomed

⁹Arthur L. Foster, "Exploring Conflict Dynamics Through Non-verbal Communication," Chicago Theological Seminary Register LIX (May 1969), 32.

¹⁰Joseph W. Kowles, Group Counseling (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall 1965), p. 7.

back into our total being, they enrich and deepen us. Arthur Foster has made extensive use of nonverbal communication.¹¹

These nonverbal communication methods involve the whole self, cognitive and volitional, emotive and somatic. Powerfully they evoke and express depth meanings along the dimensions of love and hate, hope and despair, freedom and bondage, the desire to know and the dread of knowing, winning and losing, strength and weakness, individualization and communion, independence and dependence. In short, awareness methods can develop a bond of community in a remarkably short period of time. Some methods are excellent devices for celebrating that experience of depth communication from which shared worlds and meanings evolve.

A group is not free of trouble and crises. The only way to avoid all risks and interpersonal problems is to avoid people. The aim in growth groups is to prevent problems when possible and cope with them constructively when they occur. Some problems which may be encountered are (1) superficial unproductive sessions, (2) silent persons and monopolizers, and (3) going deeper than is constructive.

The fundamental questions of any growth experience are: How much should a person's "wants" in therapy be satisfied? What should be denied to help a person fully experience the frustration of unmet needs? What should be withheld because it might be detrimental?

¹¹Paraphrased from Thomas Gordon, Group Centered Leadership and Administration (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1956) cited by Carl H. Rogers, Client-Centered Therapy (Cambridge: Riverside Press, 1951), Chapter 8.

According to Joseph W. Knowles,¹² a creative, group-centered leader seeks the following things:

1. The leader seeks the maximum distribution of leadership among group members.
2. The leader sees that all members of the group have an opportunity to participate in group decisions.
3. The leader encourages freedom of communication.
4. The leader seeks to increase opportunities for participation.
5. The leader attempts to create a nonthreatening group climate in which feelings and ideas are accepted.
6. The leader conveys feelings of warmth and empathy, thus encouraging others to do likewise.
7. The leader sets the tone for paying attention to the contributions of others, perhaps reflecting what they say with, "Let's see if I understand what you mean."
8. The leader helps build group-centered (as contrasted with individual-centered) contributions by his "linking function," pointing to the relationships the contributions of various individuals to the discussion.

A leader of this type is a communication catalyst who facilitates the group process, enabling the group's potential to be released. As meaningful relationships deepen through communication, personality needs are satisfied.

What experiences are most effective in training creative leaders so that the church school, youth fellowship, men's club, women's club, couples' club, senior citizens' fellowship, and all other groups can maximize their capacities to stimulate the growth of persons? The answer is group counseling and sensitivity training

¹²Ibid.

groups. These can occur in a leadership workshop series, an intensive weekend "leader renewal retreat," or an ongoing growth group for leaders. Psychiatrist Gerald Caplan describes a well-functioning group as one "in which the system of authority is clear and acceptable, the communication network open, and the roles of members meshed in a complementary way."¹³ Church group leaders who use their authority appropriately keep communication lines open and help members relate in mutually satisfying ways are leaders who actually possess some of the basic skills and sensitivities required in group counseling.

Selection of Members

Experience has shown that some people profit more from growth groups than others; some probably should not join at all. Careful screening of potential members is not always feasible, but the leader should try to identify those who are likely not to profit. This can be done before the first session by individual meetings with persons unknown to the leader. Unsuitable persons may be referred to other types of groups which more likely meet their needs: fellowship groups for those who desire mainly support and sociability; ordinary classes for those who seek intellectual growth; and counseling or therapy groups for those with high anxiety, precarious self-esteem, or disintegrated relationships. People with deeply disturbed relationships will constantly pull interaction toward themselves, ignoring the growth

¹³J. R. Gibb, "The Effects of Human Relations Training," in A. E. Bergin and S. L. Garfield (eds.) Handbook of Psycho-therapy and Behavior Change (New York: Wiley, 1970), p p. 2114-76.

needs of more functional members. Almost anyone can benefit from a growth group through reasonably functional relationships, some appreciable degree of self-esteem, and the desire to improve relationships, inner vitality, or the use of one's talents. Those who ordinarily cope adequately with life's demands but who temporarily stagger from a heavy blow can use a growth to extract latent growth possibilities from the crisis.

Dr. Jack Gibb's research indicates no basis for making any restrictions on group membership. Dr. Gibb said, "One of the commonest myths regarding groups is that only certain people should be included or that there should be a careful screening of participants."¹⁴ This does not fit my experience at all. In fact, when asked such questions in public, I have facetiously replied that I thought very careful screening should be done, and no one should be admitted unless one is a person! I am pleased to see this point of view confirmed by a review of all the available research.

Groups without leaders are effective as training media. Major studies undertaken at the Western Behavioral Sciences Institute of La Jolla indicate that the group process in leaderless and leader-led groups is very similar. I believe it is still an open question whether the leaderless group is as effective as the leader-led group, but at least it is useful and effective. This finding opens the way to a much wider use of groups. In my own judgment, a leaderless group is definitely preferable to a leader-led group in which the leader

¹⁴Rogers, p. 280.

displays negative characteristics.

To be optimally effective, group training must be relevant to the organizational, family, and life environment of the person. This argument is supported by the composition of Gibb's "imbedded" groups, whose members function in close and continuing relationship to each other.

Effective consulting relationships on a continuing basis are at least as important as what occurs in the group sessions in determining impact upon the participant. This is the point at which many group programs have failed. A continuing follow-up suited to the nature of the group and the situation is of the utmost importance but is rarely carried through. This is one of my own major criticisms of the so-called "growth centers" which so often provide intensive group experiences for a weekend or a week with no follow-up whatsoever.

"Normal" and "Healthy" Memberships

Most church groups work with essentially "normal" or "healthy" persons. The group members are not perceived to be ill, and the goal of group membership is not treatment. For normal, healthy people, to seek ways of more effective and more satisfying living is quite natural within the church setting. It is to groups like this that Carl Rogers devoted his attention in the early years of his work and to which he is now dedicating more and more of his time. In one of his earlier writings, he declared:

A major objective has been to discover more efficient ways of working with the great numbers of essentially normal people who

find that life has lost its savor, who quietly struggle along with their problems, who pay great costs in extra energy for their achievements, and who have tremendous potential for responding to assistance.¹⁵

The tremendous potential for response to which Rogers refers is readily apparent. Here are people seeking growth through exploration of themselves and their patterns of interaction with the goal of effecting change in behavior. The goal is not insight into behavior; it is experimentation with more effective ways of relating.

It makes considerable difference whether group members are perceived as healthy or sick. In assuming health, the church reinforces the ego strength already present. In so doing the church is in line with the most current trends in community mental health in which the resources in a person's life are capitalized and the defects minimized. Jerome Frank, for example, in writing about the mental hospital as a therapeutic community, notes the large part a patient can play in his own rehabilitation:

Instead of being viewed as an irresponsible person whose sole task is to submit passively to the ministrations of the staff, he is coming to be regarded as an individual capable of exerting some degree of self-control and participating responsibly in decisions about his welfare.¹⁶

These words are reminiscent of America's greatest psychologist, William James. James uses a graphic figure of speech to assert his conviction that man has many more capacities to draw upon for his own self-help than he ever uses:

¹⁵Persuasion and Healing (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1961), p. 197.

¹⁶William James, "Letters of William James," in his Varities of Religious Experience (London: Longman, Green, 1920), pp. 253-54.

I have no doubt that most people live, whether physically, intellectually, or morally, in a very restricted circle of their potential being. They make use of a very small portion of their possible consciousness, and of their soul's resources in general, much like a man who, out of his whole bodily organism, should get into a habit of using and moving only his little finger.¹⁷

A recent therapist, Eric Berne, provided another striking figure of speech to explore unused human capacities. He insisted that although we often act as we did when we were children (the child in us), and although we often act as we observe our parents acting (the parent in us), we can call forth adult-like patterns (the adult in us). In every transaction with another person, we decide whether we will call forth child or parent or adult. These are his words:

Every grown-up, no matter how disturbed or functionally deteriorated, has a fully-formed Adult which under proper conditions can be recathected (that is, established in emotional control).¹⁸

The point is that the church group reinforces the adult-like movements. It assumes that a person can grow, can outgrow inappropriate patterns, can make progress toward more mature, more acceptable behavior.

Prior and Continued Relationships Among Members

Moreover, the church group assumes that the members of the group can help one another not only during the group hours but also in all relationships thereafter. It is one of the chief characteristics

¹⁷Eric Berne, Transactional Analysis in Psychotherapy (New York: Grove Press, 1961), p. 112.

¹⁸George Bach, Intensive Group Psychotherapy (New York: Ronald Press, 1954), p. 107 ff.

of the church group, as distinguished especially from treatment groups, that members are likely to know one another, are likely to have contacts with one another in other programs in the church, and are likely to be in a continuing relationship with one another for the indefinite future. Such a situation would spell disaster in the minds of some group therapists who insist on the rigid observance of a rule regarding absence of contacts outside the group. However, other therapists permit extra-group relationships and even encourage them. George Bach, for example, encourages post-group meals without the therapist present.¹⁹ Samuel Hadden recognized that some group members will have had previous relationships and will accept the fact of continuing relationships as a normal part of reality. Cottle, in the "self-analytic" group experience with high school students in an interracial project, found some positive results in prior acquaintanceship; As it turned out, several of the students knew each other from school, and though prior acquaintanceship often interfered with group progress, actually it proved beneficial in some instances.

¹⁹Thomas J. Cottle, "Encounter in Color," Psychology Today, I, (December 1967), 28.

Chapter 5

GUIDELINES FOR GROUP MEMBERS

One of the qualities that makes group participation worthwhile is its informal spontaneity where people are encouraged to be themselves in their own characteristic ways. The fastest way to thwart such a mood is to hold to a rigid structure with rules that are posted and followed rigorously. It is less effective to begin a group by announcing ground rules.

Nevertheless, there is a place for guidelines. The more use is made of nonprofessional leaders, the greater is the need for guidelines. Guidelines are not rules. They are suggestions for facilitating progress rather than regulations for governing behavior. They provide a general sense of direction rather than specific instructions for each step in the growth process. The following guidelines are suggested by Robert C. Leslie¹ for group members:

- a. Responsibility is accepted for the group life.
- b. Communication is sought rather than socialization.
- c. The focus is on the present without ignoring the past.
- d. Personal sharing is preferred over diagnostic probing.
- e. Attacks are discouraged, but observations are welcomed.
- f. The leader is involved.
- g. Actions beyond the group are expected and shared.

¹Robert C. Leslie, Sharing Groups in the Church (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1971), pp. 138-159.

Sharing the experiences, the frustrations, and the satisfactions are a natural part of the life of a church group. Here is the gathered community providing reinforcement for the scattered community, the journey inward providing support for the journey outward. One final dimension of action beyond the group should be mentioned, and that is the need for some provision for referral for counseling.

Attitude is Changed in a Group

Changes in behavior patterns are achieved more easily in groups than in individual counseling. Since most of the learning that takes place in groups is indirect, less resistance is exerted than in one-to-one personal counseling. Group members learn not only when their own behavior patterns are identified but even more so when their own behavior is seen in someone else's life. A father may have little appreciation for the ineffectiveness of his patterns of dealing with his son until he sees the almost total failure of another group member who employs the same tactics.

Changes in behavior can be accomplished without ever discovering the underlying causes. Whatever the case may be for an effective interpersonal relationship, the actual behavior can be changed. What is needed is a supportive atmosphere, a challenge to change, and an opportunity to try out new patterns. Here are some statements from the group members who participated in Carl Rogers' workshop:

I am sure there has been a change in my view towards those I work with. Even though this fall has been particularly hectic in opening school, I have enjoyed the challenges, and I think I have been more creative in my approach to handling the problems

to be faced in my work.

An event to which I might refer as second birth. It brought new life to a life that was headed toward mediocrity or even failure. I can do things (even leave the ministry which I never rationally chose) that previously were out of the question.²

I believe that growth groups help make people more open to experiences that are going on within themselves, more expressive of their feelings, more spontaneous in their reactions, more flexible, more vulnerable, and probably more genuinely intimate in their interpersonal relationships.

Awareness and Communication Tools

The group leader's knowledge of self-other awareness exercises can enhance interaction within the group. William Schutz reports:

Talking is usually good for intellectual understanding of personal experience, but it is often not as effective for helping a person to experience--to feel. Combining the non-verbal seems to create a much more powerful tool for cultivating human growth.³

Awareness exercises can help us rediscover immediate experiencing and get beyond the use of words and intellectualizing merely to pretend, keep distance, control, and hide. The exercises can help us to get in touch with forgotten feelings and sensations. Most of us were programmed in childhood to ignore many rich, powerful, sensual feelings within our bodies. These disowned feelings have a destructive effect on our bodies, our spirits, and our relationships. Owned

²Carl R. Rogers, Carl Rogers on Encounter Groups (New York: Harper & Row, 1970), p. 142-143.

³William C. Schultz, Joy: Expanding Human Awareness (New York: Grove Press, 1967), p. 11.

and welcomed back into total being, they enrich and deepen us. Arthur Foster, who has made extensive use of non-verbals, declares:

These non-verbal communication methods involve the whole self--cognitive, volitional, emotive, and somatic aspects. Powerfully they evoke and express depth meanings along the dimensions of: love and hate, hope and despair, freedom and bondage, the desire to know and the dread of knowing, winning and losing, strength and weakness, inclusion and exclusion, joy and flatness, individualization and communion, independence and dependence, masculinity and femininity.⁴

Awareness methods can help develop a bond of community in a remarkably short time. Some of them are excellent ways of celebrating that experience of depth communication (called communion) from which shared worlds and meanings evolve.

These methods can be misused as emotional "trips" or superficial parlor games with no sustained value. Growth-producing use follows these ground rules:

1. Use them only as one segment of an ongoing group experience so that the learning opportunities they provide can be utilized fully.
2. Always debrief the experience by ample discussion after each exercise. In large groups, debrief in circles of five to seven. Use only as many exercises as can be debriefed thoroughly.
3. Make it clear that each person's response is suitable for that person. There are no right and wrong ways to respond --doors to understanding and communication can be opened by positive, negative, or indifferent responses.
4. Suggest that those with physical problems refrain from participating in vigorous exercises such as falling and catching, lifting and rocking, etc.

⁴For an illuminating discussion of these points, see Arthur Foster, "Exploring Conflict Dynamics through Non-Verbal Communication," Chicago Theological Seminary Register, LIX (May 1969), from p. 32.

5. As leader, participate in the exercises to share the experience with the group as well as to avoid the impression of manipulating others to do things you are not willing to do yourself.⁵

A Tool for Understanding Relationships

Eric Berne's TA (Transactional Analysis) model of the three parts of personality--Parent/Adult/Child--provides a valuable tool for individuals, couples, and groups to use in understanding and changing their relationships. Our inner Parent speaks, feels, and acts as we perceived our parents doing. This side can be constructively nurturing and limit-setting, or punishing and judgmental. Our Child side--a continuation of the way we felt as children--can be spontaneous and fun-loving, or frightened and demanding. The Adult side of our personality makes realistic decisions aimed at achieving our objectives. Growth groups seek to help people interrupt their self-damaging Child/Parent interaction and learn through practice to keep the Adult side in charge and the nurturing, limit-setting Parent and the fun-enjoying, creative Child in healthy balance with each other. This operational description of growth has proved a valuable tool for breaking the control of the past (Parent/Child) and learning to live in the present (Adult).

⁵Howard J. Clinebell, Jr., Growth Groups (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1977), p. 47.

Chapter 6

PROBLEMS FOR THE GROWTH OF A GROUP

From the beginning to the end, a group goes through the problem of orientation, of evaluation, of control, of transitions, and subsequently through relative frequencies of negative and positive reactions. Here are some common problems which are a deterrent to the growth of a group.

Tensions Can Be Imported

Tensions which have been "dragged in" from outside the group operate frequently within a group. These are just as dynamic as tensions arising from within. In studies summarized by Pepper, it appears that crowds commit more lynchings when there has been a low yield of cotton. During years of drought, voters will turn more office holders out of office. People who gather in a group often come spoiling for a fight, and "take it out" on someone for no logical reason at all. Thoughtful group workers will expect some of these situations during troubled times.¹

Conflict Must Be Used Creatively

Too many group members and leaders think that all conflict is undesirable. They fail to see that "disputation is the anvil upon

¹Charles Kenneth Pepper, "The Dynamics of Intra-church Tension" (Unpublished dissertation, Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, Louisville, KY, 1953), p. 146.

which truth is forged."² They have not learned that struggle may be the birth of a new idea, or that there may need to be a certain amount of tension as a group regains its balance after the impact of some new truth. Group conflict may be the inevitable tug-of-war before two incompatible ideas learn how to live together. It may be caused by temporary misunderstandings of worlds, insufficient evidence, faulty lines of reason, or the necessary death struggles of an old idea whose hour has come.³

Thoughtful group members will attempt to relax, to relax their feelings, and to evaluate calmly what lies beneath these surface waves. If they become aware that it is merely a personality conflict between two incompatible persons who are rationalizing by insisting that "it's the principle of the thing," then the group will suggest with amusement that they "run along" and settle their grievances outside. If that is too blunt, the group can at least ignore the agitators and proceed without them.

Too many groups feel that every issue must be met "head on." They want to insist on "Let's have it out right here." They expect a "duel and die" situation. There are times when this is the thing to do, but usually there is a better way, the way to loving and thoughtful patience and prayer.

²Dorwin Cartwright and Alvin Zander, Group Dynamics, Research and Theory (Evanston: Row, Peterson, 1967).

³Ibid., p. 228.

Other groups try to ignore the trouble, assume that agreement exists, and blithely wave peace signals without acknowledging the real issues. They assume that all will solve itself if they "let nature take its course." There are times when this is unrealistic and suicidal to the best interests of the group.⁴ Many issues resolve themselves simply by being ignored by the group.

Another reaction to conflict is to droop and mourn, to assume that the situation is hopeless and that nothing can be done. These persons usually sigh for the good old days and prophesy doom for the situation that is "going to the dogs." These crepehangers accomplish little that is worthwhile and usually hinder a creative utilization by their pessimism and downdrag on morale. Groups need to adopt the attitude, "In all these things we are more than conquerors."⁵

Other groups resort to scapegoating, attempting to fix all the blame on a single person. There is the vengeful feeling, "I'll get you for that." This is usually unfair because the "blame" is seldom the fault of one person only. Scapegoating becomes a method by which the group evades a heart-searching recognition of their own share of failure in the matter. It further heightens tendencies toward Pharisaeism and self-righteousness.⁶

⁴Pepper, p. 133.

⁵Romans 8:37.

⁶Saul Rosenzweig, "Types of Relation to Frustration," Journal of Abnormal Psychology, XXIX (1934), 279.

Ways in Which a Group Can Utilize Conflict Creatively

The group can challenge its members to explore their own attitudes in honesty before God, to be sure there is no selfish pride or blatant self-interest masquerading under some pious pretense. This is painful business and possible only if persons are humble and mature.

The group can seek to establish clearer communication. People may be merely talking past each other, assigning different meanings to terms and misunderstanding one another's intent. A wise group will insist upon clarity and a common usage of words.

Personality conflicts may be resolved partly by a division of labor. Luke used in his Gospel the word which means "the height of a fever" to describe the contention between Paul and Barnabas over the advisability of using John Mark. Yet the problem was solved by allowing the brethren to work separately, thus making possible a wider coverage of the Gospel. This is not intended to condone opinion clashes, but it suggests a sane method for their solution.⁷

Groups can reaffirm their faith in the core of integrity that exists in all members on both sides of the conflict. Ross Snyder, in an unpublished paper on "Strategies of Creative Conflict," suggests that group members need to reassert their belief that other group members are honest, too, and that something new and better will result from this crisis.⁸

⁷Pepper, p. 197.

⁸Ibid., p. 168.

Groups can take time out to get facts, to go before an "authority" in prayer, to let ideas incubate, and to search for further light. The pause for further research for acts has saved many a group from premature decision or disrupting conflict.

Groups can examine the efficiency of their organization and administration. Maybe these conflicts are growing pains which indicate that the group is outgrowing its organizational pattern. This is the method the early apostles used in solving the group conflict which had arisen when Grecian widows were being neglected.⁹

Everybody's Business is Nobody's Business

Inadequate organization may be aggravating the conflict. McDougall is completely pessimistic about the stability or even the sanity of any unorganized group. He mourns that

Participation in any group degrades the individual, assimilating his mental processes to those of the crowd, whose brutality, inconstancy, and unreasoning impulsiveness have been the theme of many writers. Yet only by participation in the group life does man become fully man, only so does he rise above the savage Organization of the group may, and generally does, in a large measure, counteract these degrading tendencies. . . . Better kinds of organization render group life the great ennobling influence by aid of which alone man rises a little above the animals and may even aspire to fellowship with the angels.¹⁰

If organization makes the difference between animals and angels, it must be important!

⁹Ibid., p. 157, Acts 6:1.

¹⁰William McDougall, The Group Mind (New York: G. P. Putman's Sons, 1920), p. 27.

Studies by John R. P. French, Jr., indicate that because the group usually has a greater degree of cohesiveness and increased motivation toward the group goals, the organized group is more determined to succeed and engages in much more interpersonal aggression when frustrated. Actual count indicated forty-five acts of interpersonal aggression between members of an organized group facing frustration, compared with six such acts in the unorganized group. The same studies revealed that the organized group showed more social freedom, we-feeling, motivation, interdependence, and equality of participation.¹¹ The organized group tries harder to get along together and suffers more when unable to do so.

A certain amount of organization is necessary if there is to be a clear designation of responsibility. Even complex organization need not cramp the Holy Spirit's working. Ezekiel saw God's work as "wheels within wheels," and yet the glory of God shone through the wheels.¹² More groups fail because of too little rather than too much organization.

Experiments conducted by Kelly and Volkart verified that persons who are keenly conscious of and value their membership in the group are most resistant to suggestions which are opposed to group standards. Organization can help to increase the meaning of membership.¹³ Good organization can increase loyalty to group standards.

¹¹Cartwright and Zander, p. 126.

¹²Ezekiel 1:16.

¹³Carl I. Hovland, Irving Janis, and Harold Kelly, Communication and Persuasion (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1953) p. 276.

Autocratic Leadership May Cause Trouble

Autocratic leadership may cause hostilities within the group. When a group leader functions as a dictator, resentments build up among the group members. In studies by Lippett and associates, it was found that the group turned its hostility and aggression against some hapless person when autocratic, domineering methods were used by the leader. Amazingly enough, the groups often "scapegoated" someone who had been previously rated by sociometric tests as being the most popular among them.¹⁴

Other studies indicate that under stern, autocratic leadership, the group members will be characterized either by a dull, listless apathy or by a swing to the other extreme of undue aggression and hostility. When the autocratic leader leaves the group, the acts of aggression suddenly increase tenfold. Also, the level of constructive work being accomplished deteriorates quickly when the autocratic leader leaves the room.¹⁵

In private interviews with group members after group meetings, nineteen out of twenty said that they liked the democratic leader better than the autocratic one. Further studies indicate that groups under an autocratic leader tend to vent their frustration and hostility toward other groups much more quickly than do groups under democratic leadership.¹⁶

¹⁴Dorothea Sullivan (ed.) Readings in Group Work (New York: Association Press, 1952), p. 364.

¹⁵Ibid., p. 268.

¹⁶Ibid., p. 370.

In studies by Kurt Lewin, it appeared that, after an autocratic atmosphere had been established, the leader had to initiate twice as many actions in order to keep things going. The group members simply "sat back and let him do it." The leader initiated 118 percent more acts than did the average member, while a democratic leader initiated only 41 percent more. The group members expressed more demands for attention, "scapegoated" someone more often, and committed many more hostile and aggressive acts. They used only half as many "we-centered" remarks, but twice the number of "I-centered" remarks as did the democratic group members.¹⁷

Homans points out that authority is resented doubly when it is exercised rarely and in circumstances in which the need for authority is not obvious. If the group has shared in the problem-solving process and shares the insight of the leader, an act of discipline is not resented. If the leader exercises authority which represents group decision and does it as a servant of the group, the group members tend not to resent it. Group members tend to resent and resist authoritative acts only if they are arbitrary, if the logic which lies behind them is not clearly understood, and if they are not consistent with the whole pattern of group administration.¹⁸

Homans further points out that many administrators and group leaders tend to think that internal social organization is not

¹⁷Kurt Lewin, Resolving Social Conflicts (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1948), p. 76.

¹⁸George C. Homans, The Human Group (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1950), p. 278.

important. Groups may be silently resistant toward their leaders, and the leaders seem to think that the way to solve the problem is to apply more force. But when a civilization or a group has reached the stage where it can be held together only by force, the application of force only hastens the decay.¹⁹ The need for centralized power outside the group is evidence that there is little maturity and vitality within it.

An autocratic leader is at times a very insecure person who vents an inner frustration upon the group. An insecure person feels a need to defend his own position and decree its arbitrary rightness. That person's unresolved conflicts force a move against people to exploit them and to get them to share the frustration and to play on their emotions. "Misery loves company," and so the leader unconsciously tries to get the group to feel miserable too. The leader may try to compensate for his own inner indecision and inertia by becoming very decisive and aggressive at some peripheral point. Apparently the dictator or the rigid, authoritative group leader is very uncertain of a personal core worth before God and is trying unconsciously to reassure himself of his own worth and rightness. Unresolved inner conflicts may result in a series of shifting, tentative assumptions, each one upheld with great vigor. Karen Horney, in her book entitled Our Inner Conflicts, traces this projection of inner conflicts in many areas and activities of life, of which the tendency toward autocratic leadership is only one.²⁰

¹⁹Ibid., p. 463.

²⁰Karen Horney, Our Inner Conflicts (New York: Norton, 1945), p. 215.

Sigmund Freud said:

Dictatorships do not seem to last long. There are things inherent in the dynamic of a group while under authoritarian leadership which tend to cause the group to dissolve or come to its end by conflict with other groups. 'A haughty spirit goeth before a fall.' Schopenhauer likened this mutual hostility within a group to the experience of a group of porcupines crowding together to keep warm. If they tried to crowd close, they pierced and hurt one another, and if they remained aloof, they froze. He thought the only solution was to try to find a mean distance at which they could tolerably exist.²¹

Thank God, a Christian group need not be merely a group of freezing porcupines, unable to bear either closeness or separation! Within the Christian group, there are unique dynamics operating which solve this dilemma.

The intensification of fear is not a good way to increase motivation. In studies by Janis and Feshbach, it was apparent that a lower intensity of fear produced greater change and conformity in a group than did a higher intensity of fear. The highest level of fear left the most emotional tension in the group, but did not produce the greatest group conformity.²² Perfect love would cast out the kind of fear which has torment and leave only a reverent awe and trust in God and a sincere regard for humanity.

²¹Sigmund Freud, Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego (London: Hogarth Press, 1948), p. 54.

²²Hovland, et. al., p. 270.

A Group Must Have Discipline

Lack of discipline and a stabilizing body of tradition can make a group unstable and liable to collapse. If autocratic leadership contains the seeds of its own decay, so does the opposite extreme of an unstructured group. Where everyone does that which is perceived to be right, the result is chaos and group disintegration. Many groups think that there is no alternative to a dictatorship other than a democratic group. Discussions which never arrive at any decision are frustrating. In studies by Lippett, it seemed conclusive that group members felt less "free space" in which to operate in an undemocratic leadership. When members were merely left on their own, they wasted time, interfered with one another in their work, and achieved little.²³

Discipline is a source of strength. A stream which is not curbed by banks soon loses its power and becomes a stagnant swamp. "Groups which require little of their membership count for little outside their membership."²⁴

McDougal cites the army as an illustration of the stabilizing effect of a clearly defined discipline. There is little doubt, too, that a well-understood body of tradition helps to give a group a sense of identity and stability. The members feel that they have a heritage to which they must be true; they have traditions to uphold; they must "defend the faith once for all delivered." The more clearly defined

²³Sullivan, p. 380.

²⁴Gordon Crosby, The Church of the Saviour (Washington: n.d.) p. 6.

and enthusiastically received this body of tradition becomes, the stronger its power to motivate and build group cohesiveness.²⁵ A group is wise to refresh and reaffirm the "faith of our fathers."

No Person Can Serve Two Masters

The tension of multi-group memberships can cause a group to dwindle in loyalty and vitality. Some persons are "joiners." They join many different groups, each of which attempts to claim the center of their allegiance and loyalty. They rush from one to the other in distracted fashion, giving lip service to all of them and not achieving a deep and satisfying group interaction and identity with any of them. In some communities, the local school has developed a messianic complex, feeling that it should be the matrix of community life, the hub of activities, and the agency whose group life claims first loyalty from the members of the community.

²⁵McDougall, p. 70.

Chapter 7

WHY GROUPS DISRUPT

In the same community, a local church may well feel that it should serve as the all-encompassing fold for the community. Both agencies plan a schedule of group activities; there are not enough nights of the week for each activity, and the "joiner" is caught between conflicting loyalties. Add to this the many and varied clubs, lodges, civic uplift groups, and hobby clubs. It is apparent that "Mr. Joiner" is soon "clubbed to death."

It is obvious that a deep and satisfying participation in a carefully selected group is better for the individual than a superficial contact with many groups. Studies conducted by the University of Oklahoma Research Institute reveal that when a person can serve only one group but must choose between two, that person usually chooses the most intimate primary group. During the Halifax disaster, the married employees ran to their homes to see that the family was safe before joining in public rescue work. In the Texas City oil explosion, the same results were disclosed. In studies of tornado disasters, also, it was revealed that group loyalties come before "company" loyalties, life comes before property, and personal friendships come before official responsibilities.¹

In several communities where union officials ordered telephone workers to resume their strike before they and their friends of the

¹Dorwin Cartwright and Alvin Zander, Group Dynamics, Research and Theory (Evanston: Row, Peterson, 1967, p. 251.

community felt that the emergency was over, a number of workers left the union rather than forsake their loyalty to their friendship group.²

Kurt Lewin feels that the potency of loyalties in the membership of subgroups is one of the great factors in intra-group tension.³

Frustration Can Do It

Unsolvable problems tend to cause a group to disrupt. A group must have some sense of achievement if it is to hang together. Continued frustration breeds despair. If goals constantly recede and seem unattainable, the group member feels like crying, "I quit." In studies at Harvard University, reported by John R. P. French, Jr., it appeared that unsolvable problems produced jests, then sharp jokes, then aggression.⁴ Later, other persons tried escape devices to get out of the dilemma. Among organized groups which were working at unsolvable problems, there developed spontaneous teamwork, then intensified efforts to find a solution, a comradeship and "we" feeling, and an evenly spread feeling of determination within the group focused toward the unsolvable problem. Among unorganized groups which were working at unsolvable problems, there developed intensified individualism and aggression toward leadership. While both types of groups tend to disrupt if kept working on unsolvable problems long enough,

²Ibid., p. 255.

³Kurt Lewin, Resolving Social Conflicts (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1948), p. 85.

⁴Paul M. Miller, Group Dynamics in Evangelism (Scottsdale, PA, Herald Press, 1961), p. 123.

the organized group made the most intense effort to solve them and endured the most frustration before disrupting.⁵

Does Absence Make the Heart Grow Fonder?

Too infrequent interaction causes groups to decline and dissolve. It takes a certain amount of activity and participation to keep membership in a group meaningful. Just as groups tend to form at focal points of frequent interaction, so groups fade away and die if meetings occur too infrequently. In tracing the decay of community life in Hilltown, it became clear that one of the factors was the lessened contact with one another, which Homans designates as "a decrease in the strength of interpersonal sentiments." This seems to hold true both for feelings of friendliness and of dislike. Both recede toward neutral if people no longer have meaningful interpersonal relations. "Absence makes the heart grow fonder" is true only for a little while, and then it works in the reverse way.⁶

The spirit of God knew this long before research discovered it. Even while the early Christians were meeting almost daily, the writer of Hebrews warned Christians against "forsaking the assembling of ourselves together,"⁷ as is the manner of some, and agreed that they should be "exhorting one another, and so much the more, as ye see the

⁵Cartwright and Zander, p. 134.

⁶George C. Homans, The Human Group (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1950), p. 361.

⁷Hebrews 12:23 (RSV).

day approaching."⁸ If the contemporary group should assemble "so much the more" than the early Christians did, then no more once-a-week gathering will suffice to keep group vitality alive.

As groups fail to meet, their norms become less clear, their goals less compelling, and their standards more divergent. As group life in Hilltown decayed and contracts became more impersonalized, persons no longer had an accepted standard by which to judge one another's conduct. People may meet one another but no longer care about one another. People may do business with one another but no longer dine together. The hundred subtle ways in which people tend to imitate their own in-group no longer operate. A group had died when it no longer exerted subtle pressures upon its members to conform to group norms. Frequent meetings are required for standards and norms to stay alive.⁹

Charity Covers a Multitude of Sins

Groups disrupt because of lack of love. Love never fails, if it is given a chance to do its healing, uniting work. Many other reasons are cited to rationalize the case, and many alibis are given to becloud the issue; but usually lack of love is one of the major factors in group disruption. Rivalry for leadership, personality clashes, unfaithfulness to group standards and refusal to pay dues are likely to be but one expression of a basic lack of love. If a

⁸Hebrews 10:35 (RSV).

⁹Homans, p. 365.

power group or clique within the group is determined to force its own way with the larger group, something has happened to the love and respect members have for one another. If a few persons use a hidden agenda, "pulling wires," and conniving to achieve a goal which is not obvious to the entire group, the result is a betrayal of the good faith of the rest of the group. If members only pretend to listen to persons holding differing opinions and are actually deciding what they will say as soon as the other person stops talking, they have adopted a rude, unloving attitude. If a discussion leader has framed the meeting to use discussion only as a pretense by which the will is imposed upon the group, this too is disrespect for persons and reveals a total lack of Christlike love.¹⁰

Peril of Discussion

Group discussion is a poor method of deciding specific details. Better methods can be worked out by an administrator.

Group discussion should not attempt to replace the lecture. The heritage of culture simply must be learned. Persons who insist on experiencing everything themselves will be reduced to eagerly participating "nincompoops."

Group discussion is difficult to attain in complex groups. The work of the city government simply cannot be carried on in a free-for-all town meeting. When a group becomes large and must attend to

¹⁰Jesse H. Zeighler, "Group Dangers, Beware," International Journal of Religious Education, XXXIII (May 1957), 17.

minute detail covering many different areas and many divergent views, discussion bogs down. Group discussion seldom presents an orderly array of arguments.¹¹ It often raises more questions than it answers and results in conclusions that have a great many "fuzzy edges."

Group discussion is time-consuming, consensus is difficult to achieve, and the resulting indecision can be a kind of tyranny, too. Persons dislike continuing to live in uncertainty, indecision, tentativeness, and probabilities. Lives need some absolutes, some anchors of the soul, and some conclusions "nailed down." The group which insists upon the exclusive use of the discussion method may count upon having some restless and insecure moments.

Our Group is Getting Too Large

Group discussion becomes less satisfying as the group becomes larger. Homans declares that at the level of the tribe or group, society has always been able to cohere. Civilization, if it is to survive, must preserve at least a few of the characteristics of the small group. But what does he mean when he says "small?" Many researchers are interested in discovering the benefits of a large group until the unique satisfactions of small group experience begin to fade away.¹² Efforts were made to hold all the other factors constant so that the influence of the size factor could be isolated and studied.

¹¹Franklin S. Haiman, Group Leadership and Democratic Action (New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1950), p. 58.

¹²Homans, p. 456.

As the number in the experimental group increased from five to twelve, the following changes were noted: there was less than a consensus of opinion, discussion influenced the members less frequently, the leader influenced the group less often, more persons felt that they did not get a chance to give their opinions, group members were more dissatisfied with the group's decision, a few persons tended to speak for the group, and more skill was required of the leader.¹³ Some researchers feel that ten members is the size for peak efficiency, while others would place the ideal either a little higher or a little lower.

Obviously, group size is a very important factor. These studies do not trace the effect of group size on groups of twenty, fifty, or eighty, but there is reason to believe that the trend toward decreasing satisfaction would increase proportionately as the group size increased. Some writers feel that, if group members are mature, the unique advantages of primary groups can be retained up to a group size of fifty or more; but there is no research known to the writer to confirm this statement.

When the Discussion Method Does Not Work

There are definite limitations to the effectiveness of the group discussion technique. An enthusiast for a certain technique frequently advocates it as a new panacea and a cure-all for human ills. Group workers should soberly admit the limitations of group discussion

¹³Cartwright and Zander, p. 517.

and group action, and thereby save themselves disillusionment and disappointment.

Group discussion should not be used to ascertain questions of fact. One does not argue, debate, or discuss the height of the Washington monument; that is decided only by measuring it. There are absolutes in many realms which are not subjects for discussion.

Group discussion is an ineffective method when the subject matter is completely new to the group. Such discussions are only a "pooling of ignorance." Group discussion is of value only when group members are cognizant of some facts about the matter under discussion and are willing to study more.

Group discussion is of little value when people have made up their minds completely and beforehand. Then it is better to debate. When an irresistible force clashes with an immovable object, very little can be accomplished.

Group discussion is ineffective if the intellectual ability of the members is not similar. A moron and a genius should not team together in a discussion group. The group method should not make a fetish of equality.

When a Group's Work is Done

When a group has completed the concern which brought it into being in the first place, there is no reason for it to continue. Many groups come to this point and fail to realize it. Because members have so enjoyed their experiences together that they decide to continue

meeting, they grope around feebly for a new reason to justify their existence as a group. In this way the project group becomes a study group, the study group undertakes a project, or the workout group turns to meditation.

Some of this change is good and necessary. A prayer-and-meditation group needs to reach out in service or it will become sterile in morbid introspection. It is inevitable that in the beginning of a prayer cell, when a member's own inadequacy is confronted afresh by the light of God's holiness, the member will spend some time thinking about the self but must soon join with other joyous searchers for God's highest in a program of outgoing love and must humbly accept God's forgiveness and get going in service, even though much immaturity remains within. Many cell groups focusing upon self-enrichment have a life expectancy of only several months, while groups gathered around a study-and-service project may remain vital for many years.

If and when the work of the group is done and the time to disband has come, the group should be dissolved without insinuating that its entire existence was a mistake and a failure. It requires courage and tact to preside at the funeral of a group organization when its time has come to die.¹⁴

¹⁴H. W. Freer and F. B. Hall, Two or Three Together (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1954), p. 48.

Tendency to Suppress Negative Feelings

The sharing group in the church also has its hazards. Although the sharing group achieves its potential best when there is a freedom to share questions, anxieties, insights, and hopes in an open and honest way, the Christian culture tends to restrict the free expression of feelings "in the Anglo-Saxon ideal of the gentleman and the lady."¹⁵ Carl Rogers, without specifically referring to church groups, indicates the kind of person often found with such groups:

Many people in our own culture feel also that a person should be contained, disciplined, preferably unaware of his feelings, and should live in terms of a firm set of disciplines that are handed down by someone--God, or someone up there--whomever he looks to as an authority.¹⁶

Many devout Christians have unintentionally separated feelings from thoughts. Sharing groups can help to bring emotions and ideas back into harmony. Almost any group has some members who resist any emphasis on disclosing feelings, but church groups are especially resistant because of the long training in withholding anything but positive feelings. In church groups, then, it is all the more necessary to be accepting of this resistance.

Two forms of resistance often deter group prospects. One is the erroneous belief that a growth group is for "people with big problems." A minister who has been successful in developing a network

¹⁵Otto Pollak, "Cultural Dynamics in Casework," Social Casework XXVIII (July 1953), 283.

¹⁶Carl Rogers in Mary Harrington Hall, "A Conversation with Carl Rogers," Psychology Today, I (December 1967), 20.

of groups, suggests that one way of handling this objection is to recruit solid leader types within the institution for the first group. When word gets around that these people are in a growth group, the "disturbed-persons" image will be dealt a decisive blow. The other form of resistance is the expressed fear that "If I come, I'll be pressured to drag all the old skeletons out of the closet." This is met in recruiting marriage groups. Emphasizing the here-and-now growth focus and the nonarchaeological approach of the group reduces this fear.

Can the church group triumph over all these tendencies to disrupt and present such unity in fellowship that unsaved observers will be convinced and drawn toward a saving relationship with Jesus Christ? The answers to group disruption can be found in the very nature of the true church as she is being created and recreated by the spirit of God. When outside tensions tend to be imported, the church group realizes that they live their total lives under the lordship of Christ. As individuals they have already submitted the tension to the mind and spirit of Christ, and they come together into a group as individuals who have already taken a position toward the outside tension.

When a church group gathers, the church "happens." Fellowship is the center of the present action of the kingdom activities of a sovereign god. Members attempt to share their lives with one another in a fellowship which embraces their whole being. This sharing becomes the scene of the creative activity of God. Tensions must meet the

redeeming power of an almighty God. If the church group will rise in faith and pay the price in obedience to really be the church, it will experience a power within its fellowship before which no imported tension can triumph and do its disrupting work.

The church group senses the presence of the living Christ in its midst, and the members gather around Him in a fellowship of obedience and mutual forgiveness. Mutual care and exhortation help each member to find relief from tension and anxiety through trust in his heavenly Father and his brother in Christ.

Groups do tend to disrupt because competition replaces co-operation, but the true church group realizes a power beyond its own which operates to produce co-operation. Much of the intense competition of our times arises because two persons seeking to be little gods clash with one another's imagined sovereignty. Two islands of self-centeredness collide and the entire ocean of opportunity does not seem large enough for each to have as much room as is needed. Within the church the Spirit of God has already convicted persons who must bow together before divine sovereignty, and that the essence of sin is self-assertion in the face of divine sovereignty. Two or more persons who sincerely seek to obey the will of God find that they can walk and serve together without so many collisions of self-interest. Co-operation is made possible among men as they share fully a delight to do the will of God.

The Christian group need not disrupt because things are not done in an orderly way. The church group is part of the kingdom

of God, and God is not the God of confusion. The spontaneity of the Holy Spirit should not be blamed for disorder. The spirit of the prophet is still subject to control by the prophet. When God is creating, order always comes out of chaos. Parliamentary law may well serve to help guarantee a fair hearing to the minority and to offer a commonly agreed-upon way of working, but it should not be insisted upon if its very unfamiliarity serves to intimidate persons and inhibit free sharing.

The authoritarian leadership which tends to disrupt groups cannot live if the church group seeks to obey the commands of Jesus. The leader who is servant of all is judged by the truth the group holds in trust. As a member of Christ's pulsing body, the leader has renounced all rights to an isolated, solitary, dominating existence. To personally lord it over God's heritage would be a sin. As the leader notices the power structures of all other groups in sub-Christian society, the leader hears the rebuking word of his Lord, "So shall it not be among you."

Researchers have discovered that groups may disrupt if they lack discipline and tradition. Within the church group God's Spirit constantly brings every member to confront the absolute holiness and ethic of Jesus. All must walk with a contrite heart, momentarily accepting forgiveness from the same God whose holiness judges them. Within a church group certain standards of discipleship are agreed upon. No member passes private-opinion judgments upon another, but the entire group seeks to maintain purity of faith, holiness of life,

and unity of fellowship by redemptive discipline. When a member breaks ranks by un-Christlike conduct, the entire group suffers and mourns. The sinning one is told of the true condition; reality is represented, and there is a reminder that the actions have severed that person from living interaction with the church. The disciplined member is called with yearning compassion to repent and re-unite with the living body of Christ. The army secures group strength by a rigid discipline, externally applied; whereas the church can know the more powerful discipline of a pure life within, a working of God's spirit which will convict and sear out sin in its midst and become an overall desire to obey Christ at any cost.

Multi-group memberships need not disrupt the church group. The kingdom of God, expressed centrally in the church, shall have unquestioned priority. Other groups will have to take their chances with left-over time. The Christian is engaged in a great work and cannot devote time to good but second-rate groups. Every problem of man's common life needs to be viewed from the perspective of God's Word and will. For the real child of God, there is no "secular" world where the lordship of Christ need not be expressed. He calls all other groups to bring their concerns and bow together before the God of all wisdom and all life.

Unsolvable problems will not disrupt a group so often if they are brought under the light of divine revelation and into the presence of One who is omniscient. Too infrequent meeting need not trouble the group whose concerns are as wide and deep as those of its Lord. A

church group lives with the entire redeeming mission of the church in the world always upon its heart; and to do its work in the world, it will need to meet often.

What about group size? Many persons smugly say, "I like a small church; a small group offers warmer fellowship." But the reason their group is small and stays small is that they never win any new members! A group which is successful in exercising love soon grows big, and so loses many of the unique benefits possible only to small groups. It seems that this must be planned for and that the church needs to have its members experience the church within the church through the small, primary, face-to-face groups of the church program. If groups are to be kept small so that all can share vitally and the entire church may grow as rapidly as it should, then groups will need to divide and subdivide, and members will need to learn to enter deep affinity with new persons rather quickly. Group members will need to be quick to discover what God's Spirit is doing in new friends and explore the oneness which God's Spirit is creating among them. Persons who are one in Christ should discover their oneness quickly. Persons who share the same divine life cannot remain strangers long.

Discussion need be no fetish of the church group. Ordered proclamation of the will of God from His word is often needed more than free-for-all discussion. The church group is free to use all legitimate channels of communication so as to share their life and faith with one another.

Chapter 8

DEALING CONSTRUCTIVELY WITH GROUP PROBLEMS

In spite of personal and spiritual growth in the group, there are many hazards and pitfalls in group participation. The only way to avoid all risks and interpersonal problems is to avoid people. The aim in growth groups is to present problems when possible and cope with them constructively when they do occur. Some problems which may be encountered are:

Superficial, Unproductive Sessions

Most groups have arid periods. If a group seems stale, an honest evaluation by the whole membership may help. Do members feel their needs are being ignored, that you as a leader are dominating? Are the guidelines being followed? If a frank evaluation does not help, discuss the whole situation with a more experienced group facilitator. This discussion may help you diagnose and treat the malady.

Silent Members and Monopolizers

The leader may try to draw the silent one in or quiet the monopolizer. A better approach is to ask the group how it reacts to the individual involved. The question surfaces underlying feelings of anger towards the person who can then be helped to learn from the confrontation. Silence can mean many things--fear of opening up, passive control, productive reflection. The consistently silent

person should realize that others probably feel that silence represents a withholding of feelings. The chronic monopolizer is often a manipulator who is frightened by the threat of closeness or by situations which cannot be controlled. That person uses a verbal barrage to maintain distance and control. A combination of support and affirmation to allay anxieties, and a firm confrontation concerning the effects of behavior on relationships may help. If nothing silences the verbal steamroller, it may indicate that that person cannot tolerate enough closeness to benefit from a growth group.

Going Deeper Than is Constructive

Some individuals respond in every small group as though it were depth therapy. A leader's responses can head off self-disclosure that may be overthreatening to individuals or the groups generally. Here is a rough index of threat levels of interaction:¹

Less Threatening	Level 1 - Discussing ideas, information, theories, generalization.
	Level 2 - Sharing personal experiences from the past.
	Level 3 - Sharing current problems and feelings from outside the group.
	Level 4 - Encountering here-and-now relationships and feelings in the group.
Most Threatening	Level 5 - Sharing very personal problems not ordinarily discussed outside the family.

¹Howard J. Clinebell, Jr., The People Dynamic (New York: Harper & Row, 1972), p. 44-54.

Most people can benefit significantly from sharing on levels 1, 2, and 3. Leaderless groups generally should stay on these levels; the feelings aroused by levels 4 and 5 usually require a leader's skills if they are to be used for growth. Most short-term groups with competent leaders should not go beyond level 3, mainly because there is not enough time to work through deep feelings. Relatively inexperienced group leaders should increase their skills and confidence in levels 1 to 3 before attempting to move to levels 4 and 5.

If a leader senses that someone is revealing very personal problems prematurely or in an appropriate setting, he should avoid responding in ways that focus on what has been said. The leader should help the group share (on levels 1, 2, and 3) and not overload the feeling circuits.

The Disturbed Member

Giving individual attention to those who seem upset is usually adequate. If it is not, and the disturbance continues, referral to a competent psychotherapist is in order. The chances of this problem occurring are reduced drastically if the threat-level issue and proper selection of participants are taken seriously. In addition, three procedures on the leader's part reduce the risk of serious problems--working with a co-leader, having regular supervisory conferences with a more experienced growth facilitator, and continuing in one's own growth group.

There is good evidence that sensitive, supportive leadership

could prevent many of the disturbances that occur in group sessions. In one study of college students suffering from "an enduring, significant negative outcome" from encounter groups,² it was found that groups with most of the severe problems had had aggressive, confronting, authoritarian leaders.

Threatening the Establishment

Opposition from persons in authority takes various forms. Some extend guilt-by-association from the extremist fringe of the group movement to all groups. Some have negative biases toward small groups because of painful experiences with rebellious, partially liberated "group-ers" in their organization. Administrators who are rigid, "organization" types find any group which nurtures the free spirit an irritant if not an outright threat to their values and lifestyle. Anyone who is growing and open poses a threat to those who have made a virtue of their private prisons.

How one handles opposition depends on its nature and one's power position in the organization. Good intra-institutional diplomacy and public relations are helpful in reducing opposition to a minimum, interpreting the nature and purposes of a proposed group, and obtaining official approval. Reporting on the group program to a governing board in a way that does not violate group confidence helps allay anxieties that could otherwise sabotage the program. If

²Irvine D. Yalom and Morton A. Lieberman "A Study of Encounter Group Casualties," Archives of General Psychiatry, XXI (1971).

opposition is violent and not ameliorated by evidence that the group program is responsibly led and constructive, one has several alternatives. Ignore it if your internal power position is strong; beat a strategic retreat, at least temporarily, from leading groups at all; or find a freer base of operations. It is impossible to be a liberating facilitator when you feel trapped or painfully vulnerable.

Chapter 9

CONCLUDING COMMENTS

With the mushrooming development of groups, what does the future hold in regard to the group movement itself? Considering the implications that the future may hold for church and secular institutions, what are some of the directions it may take?

The recent mass murder tragedy in Jonestown, Guyana, perpetrated by the Reverend Jim Jones of the People's Temple validate the contentions that the small groups may drift into the hands of exploiters, those who have come onto the group scene primarily for their own financial and/or psychological benefits. The faddists, the cultists, the mudists, the manipulators, those whose needs are power or recognition may come to dominate the encounter group horizon. In this case, I feel it is headed for disaster. It will gradually be seen by the public for what it would then be: a somewhat fraudulent game operating not primarily for growth and constructive change but for the benefit of its leaders.

Another equally disappointing possibility is that, because of excessive zeal and the use of more and more "far out" procedures by leaders and facilitators, groups may be condemned by the people in the pews without ever looking at the more solid and positive core of the trend. Already I am told that groups focused on personal growth are losing enrollment to those where the drawing card is the charisma of the leader or the opportunity for frequent body contact with members of both sexes. To the extent that this development takes precedence,

"encounter group" may come to be a dirty word just as "progressive education" did many years ago.

I can envision the same thing happening to encounter groups, sensitivity training, T-Groups, and the rest. They would become objects of condemnation and die out. Meanwhile, all the essential elements--the building of trust in small groups, the sharing of self, the feedback, the sense of communication that is so desperately needed --would become meaningless.

Being optimistic and hopeful by nature, I cannot spend too much time on these gloomy visions. Certainly another of the real possibilities is that the whole surge toward groups may continue to grow rapidly and soundly and to spread its influence ever more widely. In this case, we will see a proliferation of forms. I am not prescient enough to suggest more types than we already see in incipient form and which have been mentioned in this paper: groups focused on the building of teams on the development of true community, on deeper growth of sensory awareness, on meditation, on creativity. I am sure there will be many, many more, with differing foci, but maintaining many of the essential qualities of the encounter group. These will be the new ways of "turning on," of living life vividly and fully without the use of drugs.

I believe that the whole movement toward intensive group experience in all its forms has profound significance, both for today and tomorrow. Those who may have thought of the encounter group as a fad affecting only a few people temporarily would do well to

reconsider. In the troubled future that lies ahead of us, the trend toward the intensive group experience is related to deep and significant issues of change. These changes may occur in persons, in institutions, in our urban and cultural alienation, in racial tensions, in our international frictions, in our philosophies, our values, and our image of the human being. It is a profoundly significant movement, and the course of its future will, for better or for worse, have a profound impact on all of us.

From my experiences in groups--the meaningful development of spontaneous, intimate human relations and the numerous peak moments in dialogue, in confrontation, in sensory awareness, in body expression, in sensitive awakenings--I have struggled to understand the nature of individual life, the nature of person-to-person encounter, and the nature of unity and communion. I do not believe that any set of principles or techniques or theories or concepts can capture an ongoing, moment-by-moment life of a group. Ideas, techniques, principles, spontaneity, and love among human beings have their own particular forms of expression in different groups, and the specific individuals involved must determine their own way of life. The challenge of each group is to discover the way, through struggle with distortions, barriers, and defenses; to create an authentic, living process via self-exploration and self-awareness, through feedback that is not evaluative but seeks only to clarify and open, through peak moments of intimacy and communion, through sharing of the vital within oneself and in one's relations, sharing that is not mere reporting and repeating

but that, in itself, is a form of actualizing potentials.

I see, consistently, two significant values operating: being an individual, purely, honestly, and fully, centering in one's own thoughts, feelings, preferences, and interests; and being within a single relationship, which means at times steeping oneself in the world of the other, transcending the private, individual needs and desires, sacrificing one's own self-centered truths by becoming unified and connected with other human beings. Often the individual can pursue his own development, his own perceptions of an essential truth in himself or in others without in any way denying or impeding the growth of the group as a whole. This, then, is the crucial value--self-discovery and self-awareness, insisting on being oneself, purely and completely, moment by moment. Often the group can experience unity and communion without, in any way, requiring personal sacrifice or personal denial of the leaping away from oneself into the world of others, away from one's own private interests or goals. When there is a genuine conflict of values between the individual and the group as a whole, or even between persons, something has to give or only tugging and pulling together with the impact of irresolvable forces will remain.

There are times when individuality looks more like selfishness, egoism, and narcissism, more like a concern for oneself, first and always. Sometimes the group can give way and take the path of one person, alter its course and search for an integration that recognizes and includes each person authentically. Sometimes the individual can

give way, stop hanging onto himself as the main or only value in life, and realize that being part of a group, part of a community is also an essential human requirement.

Individual life, person-to-person life, and group life--each has an essential meaning. Being extremely, consistently, and determinedly in one of these paths to the exclusion of the others or at the expense of the others represents a limited and warped orientation. A philosophy of extreme individualism comes close to hedonism and narcissism. A way of life based on the single relationship comes close to narrowness, rigidity, and conformity.

The ideal, healthy way of life, as I see it, involves a balance of these experiences, an involvement, a concern, and the actualization of each to some degree.

In my theological perspective, I have focused more on the experiential aspect of theology rather than its cognitive understanding, emphasizing the present rather than the past, on feelings rather than on dogma, on observing rather than on analyzing, on sharing rather than on solving. If a person brings an existential problem and seeks an answer, the clergy should not solve or try to understand its origin but should acknowledge it and relate to its observed behavior. It is the clergy's task to provide support when support is needed, to pursue a tentative expression of feelings until the real emotion is revealed, to protect a person whenever under attack, to challenge the group toward growth and to guide a person to see the link between interaction and Christian theology.

Therefore, within the group process a person learns the meaning of the priesthood of all believers, enjoys becoming an integral part of the Christian community, experiences the grace of God (an undeserved love), crucifies undesired behavior of the past in the presence of the faithful and God, and lays the foundation of a resurrection and is revived as a new creature with in-depth understanding of God and His people.

I learned through the in-depth study of group dynamics that the actualization of our human potentialities is closely related to the rejuvenation of our institutions. Therefore, we must start with ourselves and the institutions with which we are most intimately connected.

Growth groups in the church can help us in this renewal process. When leaders of the church emphasize groups as a major concern in boards and commission decisions, significant results are achieved. The level of participation and enthusiasm tends to rise as real human needs are met. In churches, the much-abused term "church renewal" becomes an experienced reality as congregations commit themselves to incorporate ministries of mutual growth. People experience love, reconciliation, and grace in the small communities of caring and sharing. The same enlivening occurs in the church school when teachers become growth oriented persons. They are not afraid to abandon the conventional ways of teaching but are enthused to try new and innovative ways for better results. In my teaching of Bible study, I discovered that growth groups and inductive methods of instruction

have initiated a refreshing difference.

Among the various phases of the church administration, the recruitment and training of the potential group leaders should be the first priority. They can serve as the catalyst in training more people and enriching other lives as well as their own. As more and more people are trained in teaching, communication will become more effective, interpersonal relationships will improve, and both the church and its members will gradually grow.

While dealing with the demythologizing of pietistic encounter, I have tried to demonstrate that the current encounter group movement is not alien to the religious communities in the West. The basic pattern of the encounter movement is imbedded in Judeo-Christian pietism, which emphasizes the here and now. The factors which are an integral part of the intensive group experience include group encounter, high trust levels in interaction, honest confession amid a caring community, experimental mysticism, mutual pastoral care, extended conversion marathons, radical accountability to the group, gut level self-disclosure, and brutally candid feedback procedures. My purpose is to demonstrate that there are direct analogies between small group encounter in protestant and Jewish religious movements and the current encounter culture.

Now, the question is, "Should the church become a growth center?" In the light of their historic kinship, how can the present alienation between existing religious communities and experimental encounter groups be overcome? What can be appropriated and what must

be transmuted? What in particular can we learn from experiments in non-verbal communication that might help to re-shape the community so that the wisdom of the world may be used for the growth of the church and its members?

Pertinent data is provided for the clergy and the laity to determine what course they should take in the pilgrimage of group dynamics understanding.

Throughout this project I have stressed the need of the active role that the leader plays in helping the group achieve its goals. Many groups fail because of the members' demands for a democratic proceeding in the life of the group and the authoritarian approaches taken by the leader.

I have tried to express the needs of the sharing group by presenting various theories, concepts, and quotations from numerous disciplines. I have envisioned the potential for rebirth into a new life in the small sharing group and have, in fact, experienced the rejuvenation of so many persons in the group setting. I continue to work for an understanding of leadership approaches.

I have focused on the opportunities for using lay persons in leading small sharing groups in the church, because I do not believe that the leadership task needs to be restricted to professionals. I have further tried to set forth the guidelines that are important for leaders to follow, whether they be professional or non-professional, clergy or lay persons. I do see the leader as the strategic person. The leader sets the tone for the life of the group, creates the

climate for group activity, provides a focus for discussion initiated by others, introduces topics that need to be discussed but have been avoided, initiates observation about individual participation in the group, and serves as resource person when additional help is needed.

One last word about the clergy's role in leadership. I have stressed the clergy's place as recruiter, trainer, and supporter of the laity. The clergy person needs to be an enthusiastic supporter of the small group if the small group is ever to become significant in the church that it serves. Without the strong support of the senior clergy, most small groups will disintegrate rapidly. Since most clergy persons are oriented to a preaching ministry rather than to experimentation with small group dynamics, the success of the small group in the church depends on their understanding of its importance and the vital need for the strength and growth of the church.

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